



Andreea Bonea Olivia

**DANCES OF RESISTANCE IN PORTUGAL ON AND  
OFF THE MARGINS**

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# FACULDADE DE LETRAS

## DANCES OF RESISTANCE IN PORTUGAL ON AND OFF THE MARGINS

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## **RESUMO**

### **Danças de resistência em Portugal, dentro e fora das margens**

As 'danças de resistência' em Portugal, dentro e fora das margens, referem-se a movimentos vernáculos e práticas de dança, nascidos fora das práticas do movimento institucional e fora de Portugal, que são manifestações de resiliência contra várias formas de opressão e afirmam a existência dos seus praticantes: Eu danço, por isso existo.

Esta dissertação analisa a experiência e a vida de dança de vários praticantes em Portugal, oriunda de vários mundos de dança: estilos de dança urbana, Vogue, e danças orientais, e reflete sobre como estes estilos de movimento foram adaptados, e subvertidos à realidade da dança portuguesa. Estas expressões de movimento provaram ser uma forma saudável de afetar as mudanças sociopolíticas, divorciadas da necessidade de combate assertivo ou dos discursos da sociedade civil.

Este trabalho de investigação é sobre intérpretes em Portugal, que praticam a dança como forma de intervenção para trazer o foco a certas questões (por exemplo, injustiças sociais, de género e raciais) e para dar voz a comunidades mal servidas, que usam a dança como forma de afirmação de género e identidade ou que recuperam raízes e conhecimentos ancestrais através do veículo da dança, que contestam o seu posicionamento marginal através do uso dos seus corpos, produzindo epistemologias de resistência e libertação.

O objectivo desta pesquisa é reservar espaço para estas práticas de dança e praticantes, analisar a intenção por detrás da sua arte, e também abordar os diferentes tipos de opressão com que estes artistas se deparam (por exemplo, falta de acesso e oportunidade, patriarcado e desigualdades de género, imperialismo cultural, discriminação sexual) em Portugal, hoje em dia.

**Palavras-chave:** (5) danças vernaculares, dentro e fora das margens, resistência, praticantes de dança em Portugal, fusões artísticas

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Dances of resistance in Portugal, on and off the margins**

The 'dances of resistance' in Portugal on and off the margins, refer to vernacular movements and dance practices, born outside the institutional movement practices and outside of Portugal, that are manifestations of resilience against various forms of oppression and are affirming the existence of their practitioners: I dance, therefore I exist.

The paper analyzes the experience and dance life of various grassroots dance performers in Portugal, stemming from various dance worlds: street dance styles, ballroom Vogue, and Oriental dances, and reflects on how these movement styles have been adapted, embodied and subverted to the Portuguese dance reality. These movement expressions of cultural resistance have proved to be a healthy way to affect socio-political changes, divorced from the need for assertive combat.

The research focuses on performers in Portugal, who practice dance as a form of intervention to bring focus to certain issues (eg. social, gender and racial injustices) and to give voice to underserved communities, who use dance as a form of gender and identity affirmation or who reclaim ancestral roots and knowledge through the vehicle of dance, who contest their marginal positioning through the use of their bodies, producing epistemologies of resistance and liberation.

The aim of the paper is to hold space for these dance practices and practitioners, analyze the intention behind their art, and also address different types of struggles that these performers are faced with (eg. lack of access and opportunity, patriarchy and gender inequalities, cultural imperialism, sexual discrimination) in Portugal today.

**Keywords:** (5) vernacular dances, on and off the margins, resistance, dance practitioners in Portugal, artistic fusions

## ÍNDICE

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	5
About Resistance .....	7
Dances as visible, politically articulated resistance	9
Dance as identity-based resistance for marginalized communities	11
Dance as hidden resistance	13
About Margins.....	18
Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY	22
Chapter 4. PERFORMERS OF DANCES OF RESISTANCE IN PORTUGAL	25
Piny Orchidaceae .....	26
Lúcia Afonso (Baronesa) .....	30
Éric Santos .....	34
Mellisa Sousa .....	37
Catarina Campos .....	39
Nala Revlon.....	41
Catarina Branco .....	43
Ines Pita (Moony) .....	47
Chapter 5. POINTS OF CONTACT	50
BIBLIOGRAFIA/FONTES CONSULTADAS	58
ANEXOS	62

## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Anthropologist André Lepecki talks about the historical absence of the Portuguese dancing body and is referencing in his doctoral thesis the works of dance historian José Sasportes and his essay from 1968 'Portugal has dance history but no continuing tradition', noticing the lack of Portuguese dance productions during the years 1902 - 1974. (Lepecki, 2004)

Even so, during these years, numerous notorious foreign performers and dance companies (eg. Loïe Fuller, Les Ballets Russes, Josephine Baker, Merce Cunningham) visited Lisbon and performed for Portuguese audiences, perhaps leaving some inspiration behind for the authors to follow in the decades after the April 1974 revolution.

With the end of the 'Estado Novo's' dictatorship and of the Portuguese colonial empire, contemporary theater dance has witnessed significant growth in Portugal, from the incubator which was Ballet Gulbenkian to the 'Nova dança portuguesa' and its crop of authors and choreographers (eg. Clara Andermatt, Vera Mantero, João Fiadeiro, Paulo Ribeiro). The 'Nova dança portuguesa' was a movement inherited from the American post-modern dance of the 1960's as well as the European new dance, especially French and Belgian. (Fiadeiro, 2006)

Dance historian Sally Banes explains how American post-modern dance was heavily influenced by the socio political agenda of the 70's (eg. the Black power, LGBTQ and anti-Vietnam war movements) and that it was drawing inspiration from non-Western forms and philosophies, from African dances to Eastern expressions of movement.

One of the devices for bearing the new expression, [...] is the use of popular genres and allusions to popular performance styles, including vernacular dance". (Banes, pg. xxxi)

She continues stating that:

The merging of 'high art' and popular traditions is one of the characteristics of postmodernism [...]; vanguard artists have perennially turned to folk, popular and exotic art sources for breaking with mainstream values as well as for 'new' materials and techniques. (Banes, 1987, pg. xxxii)

According to Banes, even though the avant-garde dance improvisers of the sixties and seventies were mostly white, they were strongly influenced by the African American aesthetics of Jazz.

Scholar and dancer Brenda Dixon Gottschild, whose work focused on digging out African subtexts in post modern dance, reveals some of the qualities that post modern dance inherited from Africanist principles:

The coolness, relaxation, looseness, and laid-back energy; the radical juxtaposition of ostensibly contrary elements; the irony and double entendre of verbal and physical gesture; the dialogic relationship between performer and audience—all are integral elements in Africanist arts and lifestyle that are woven into the fabric of our society. (Gottschild, 1996, pg.51)

Circling back to the main sources of inspiration for the ‘*Nova dança portuguesa*’, the post-modern American dance, one striking aspect of the Portuguese dance scene after 1974, represents this indirect influence of African and Eastern movements, mediated through the western-centric postmodern dance, even though Portugal had direct cultural access to the primary dance springs, practiced by its former colonies.

For example, Mozambique was well known for its immense wealth of dances from the clandestine anti-colonial resistance dances to the national dance companies and dance schools. Angola is credited with the roots of Capoeira movements, which then served as an inspiration for what was to develop into Breakdance as an Afro-American street dance of resistance. The Semba dance of the 1950’ies stems also from the region of Angola. This will morph into today’s sensuous Kizomba dance, which is also very present in Portuguese African night clubs, as a cultural response to the divisive politics of race and economics. Another tradition that was encountered in Portugal, connected to North Africa (Morocco) was the women trance dances of which the adufe instruments remained. This tradition was later incorporated and systematized during the Estado Novo period, being assimilated by folklore.

Unfortunately this first-hand cultural access to the former colonies, didn’t leave many linear imprints on the Portuguese dance map, and the relationship with movement stemming from Africa was mediated by the American discourse of post-modern dance. As stated above, most of the officially recorded influences that permeated the Portuguese dance chronology, presented western-centric characteristics.

Recently, there have been attempts to analyze and uncover the genealogies of dance as an artistic practice in Portugal, showcasing various milestones and events in relation to transformations in society as well as the choreographic discourse within the institutional framework (eg. projects such as ‘*Para Uma Timeline a Haver*’ initiated by Ana Bigotte Vieira, Carlos Manuel Oliveira and João dos Santos Martins, a project which sifts through mountains of archive data and pieces together a more schematic view of Portuguese dance history).

But even such rich and complex initiatives focused on the dance practices that were happening at the institutional level. Moreover such mapping initiatives didn’t showcase the full impact of the postcolonial cultural and demographic reconfiguration, as most of the dancers that were recorded in



this archival work and timeline originated from continental Portugal. Very few dancers from the former Portuguese colonies were chronicled in this work.

This fact was also echoed by the perspective of international choreographer and researcher Dr. Vânia Gala, born in Coimbra, Portugal and of Angolan descent, who was interviewed for the purpose of this research paper. Dr. Gala holds a PhD in Dance and Performance Studies, at Kingston School of Arts, Kingston University in London and an MA in Choreography at Trinity Laban – Conservatoire of Music and Dance in the United Kingdom. Her work is at the nexus of critical dance studies, performance philosophy and experimental practices in dance, theater and visual arts performance. Dr. Gala mentioned that her research and dance paths were mainly developed outside of Portugal, due to the limited opportunities that the institutional Portuguese dance scene was offering at the time.

In an utterly parallel realm, outside of the Portuguese institutional framework, various street and community dance styles unfolded and flourished as a reaction to the elitist, mainstream dance culture. If deconstructed, many of these movement styles can be traced back to the African continent.

As a long term dance practitioner and witness of such vernacular movement styles happening outside of the academic realm, within and beyond the borders of Portugal, I felt that there is an opportunity to reflect upon such practices and some of the dance performers that embody these types of movements in Portugal. Along these lines, I've followed various dance performers in Portugal, not only to document their dance presence in Portugal but also to find out more about their context and their creative practices and seeing what it is like to be a performer, practicing dances of resistance in Portugal, especially in the aftermath of the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore this research seeks to unveil dance voices outside the mainstream public sphere, with the awareness that these voices share some common qualities: performers utilizing dance to transcend different types of oppression (ie. lack of access and opportunity, cultural imperialism, gender inequalities, sexual orientation etc), away from the center and showing empowerment and resilience on the margins, in dance and culture.

The practitioners of these dances are constantly traveling on and off the margins, confronting themselves with various types of resistance that stem from their positionality: when on the margins with the struggles that accompany marginality, when off the margins with the resistance of not erasing the profound subtext of their origins.

As a problem statement, I argue that vernacular dances, as practiced by their practitioners, represent a form of everyday resistance against the dominant culture and the body of the dance performers itself is a site of resistance, cultural production and liberation.

## Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on presenting a literature review of pertinent case studies as well as a theoretical analysis on the use of vernacular dances as a catalyst affecting socio-political changes. Most of these examples are examples of visceral dances born inside communities and created as part of everyday life. Furthermore, the concept of 'on and off the margin's will be analyzed as it pertains to the analyzed dance styles and its practitioners.

The various definitions of the syntagm 'vernacular dance practices' or 'popular performances' put emphasis on words such as 'naturally', or 'popular' referring to dances that have been created informally within a particular community, as well on words such as 'official' alluding to institutionalized culture and placing these concepts in contrast. In the urban context, 'vernacular dances' are sometimes referred to as 'street dances' (eg. dances stemming from Hip Hop culture: Breakdance, Popping, Locking and ballroom and clubbing cultures: Vogue, house, Waacking). Vernacular dances can also refer to folk dances and movement rituals, pertaining to a certain region (eg. North Africa - Algeria & Egypt, where Raks-sharki, otherwise known as Bellydance, was born).

African American novelist Ralph Ellison, a huge proponent of cultural pluralism, as a response to the conflicts between elitist and populist values, provides a comprehensive definition of the term 'vernacular'.

But by "vernacular" I mean far more than popular or indigenous language. I see the vernacular as a dynamic process in which the most refined styles from the past are continually merged with the play-it-by-eye-and-by-ear improvisations which we invent in our efforts to control our environment and entertain ourselves. This is not only in language and literature, but in architecture and cuisine, in music, costume, dance, tools, and technology. (Ellison, 2003, pg.612)

Author and practitioner of community-based performance art, Jan Cohen Cruz, references the work of scholar Raymond Williams, who gives some of the characteristics of the concept of 'popular community based performance'. First he places these in opposition to high art. This is a direct consequence of access to education and the identification between culture and class. Another characteristic is the folk nature of these performances, implying a collective authorship and viewpoint. This type of popular performance doesn't require a specific education to be consumed, it is liked by many. Most importantly it is related to the daily circumstances of the lives of community members, where it is produced. (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, pg. 81 - 85)

Even though the examples of the selected vernacular dances, stem from distinct geographies and ethnicities, the narratives of resistance share similar traits.

This chapter will analyze some of the literature surrounding vernacular dance styles, originating from 'street cultures' such as hip-hop with its associated dance styles such as break-dance, pop, Locking. These were pioneered by the Afro American and Latin communities in the 1960'ies in Brooklyn New York, who were unrepresented and not accepted into dance studios, dance schools and clubs because of their race and class.

Another direction that is further explored is the 'ballroom culture' with it's dance style: Vogue, which is a gender affirming movement style, political in nature that aroused from Harlem ballroom cultures, as danced by African-American gay and trans people, from the early 1960'ies through the 1980'ies. They offered a new language of expression, challenging social frameworks and creating a meeting point for race, gender, sexual differences, showing that these are fluid and constantly evolving.

Finally the lens will be on MENAHT (Middle East, North Africa, Hellenic and Turkish) folk dances grouped under the umbrella of Oriental dances (aka. Bellydance). The concept of Bellydance in general is heavily charged with a negative baggage such as: female hyper-sexualization and objectification. Even though the essence of Bellydance means the celebration of femininity and the female body, the dance itself is regarded at times as a form of resistance against religious conservatism and social norms, especially in Muslim countries, but also as a figment of Orientalist practices.

The reader must wonder what all the enumerated vernacular dances have in common. The points of contact between these dance styles are many. For once, if deconstructed, all these analyzed dance forms share cultural roots and origins, as well as common rhythms and steps, leading to movement styles originating from the African continent (Harshaw, 2020), imported to Europe and the Americas via the slave trade. For instance hip movements are prevalent in both Oriental dances (shimmies) and Vogue (catwalk) and have been found in many North and West African traditional dances. The closeness to the ground that is visible in Breakdance, Vogue and sometimes in Bellydance, can be traced back to Angola (where also the Capoeira movement roots were born). The polyrhythmic use of the body through layers (eg. moving two different body parts to different rhythms), the intricate body isolations that are typical for West African dances, can be easily tracked in Oriental dances, but also in waving and animation (which are sub styles of street dances). Many steps in house dance stem from mundane activities that were performed daily in various agricultural communities in African countries: shuffling, stamping, hopping, embodying the tending of the fields and animals. The MC-ing (emceeing or rhyiming) pillar in Hip Hop style, mimics the rhythmic spoken-word of the West African

context, where dancing and speaking are not separate disciplines. This can be associated with the West African storytellers and historians, otherwise known as griots.

Another common aspect is the improvisational nature that occurs in black vernacular dancing. According to historian and dance professor Jacqui Malone, improvisation is “an additive process...a way of experimenting with new ideas; that mindset is Africa's most important contribution to the Western Hemisphere” . She continues to state that :

All African American social dances allow for some degree of improvisation [...] the idea of executing any dance exactly like someone else is usually not valued.... Black idiomatic dancers always improvise with intent—they compose on the spot—with the success of the improvisations depending on the mastery of nuances and the elements of craft called for by the idiom. (Malone, 1996, pg.33–34)

The continuity of improvisation can be found in all the analyzed vernacular dances (eg. freestyle Hip Hop battles, ‘persona’ stylization in Vogue balls and free range movements in Oriental dances, characterized by improvised articulations of the torso, hips, hands, arms and head).

Moreover, the practitioners and performers of these dances, who will be analyzed in Chapter 4, find themselves on a spectrum between all these styles and often embody more than one style: some are pure oriental dance practitioners , others are pure Hip Hoppers and or Voguers and others place themselves somewhere in between fusing all these dance styles together (eg. combining elements from various dance styles, or using elements of a dance style with music that is not typically associated with that dance style).

Lastly all these dance styles manifest various forms of resistance, and represent a form of empowerment in the socio-political arena.

### **About Resistance**

Foucault stated that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”(Foucault, 1990, pg 95-96)

The work of Hollander and Einwohner was instrumental in reviewing a lot of the literature that invokes the term of resistance, at the same time attempting to categorize and define the concept. They illustrate “how everything from revolutions to hairstyles has been described as resistance”. (Hollander, Einwohner, 2004, pg.534)

Given the broad range and the diversity of uses of the concept of resistance, at all levels of human interactions, the term is loosely defined. However, for the purpose of this research paper, couple resistance categories and concepts stand out:

The first concept refers to the physical resistance, where the persons who resist are using their bodies, individually or collectively (eg. marches, protests, dances, rebellions). This physical aspect of resistance generally also has a symbolic coat: women performing dances as a political act against islamist conservatism, or break dancers utilizing their bodies to master dance poses defying gravity, as metaphor of resistance against threatening oppression.

Another concept refers to hidden transcripts of resistance. James C. Scott's perspective on hegemony and power, introduces the notion of 'everyday resistance', about individuals acting daily in ways that might defy authority. Everyday resistance is not easily seen like collective resistance, and it's typically hidden and not publicly expressed. Hence, resistance can be overtly oppositional or can be more subtle (eg. working slowly, feigning ignorance, or defying authority by wearing certain clothes, smuggling goods). Even more nuanced is the concept of 'intent' where the oppressed intends to resist against the oppressor, however because resistance is too dangerous or costly, it occurs privately. Scott's everyday resistance may remain invisible to the power structures but it can be pretty obvious to astute observers.

He emphasized that "the training in verbal facility implied by rituals of this kind enables vulnerable groups not only to control their anger but to conduct what amounts to a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript."(Scott, 1992, pg.137)

At times, the nonsensical dimension of marginality can occur, where the resisters themselves are not necessarily regarding it as resistance at all, rather a normal part and way of their life, personality, and culture. This marginality, divorced from its position to the center, can be perceived as creative resistance.

In liminality, people play with familiar elements and make them unfamiliar. There is an opening of possibilities, suspension at the level of logic or the sense of everyday life (its values and its social hierarchies), I would say, nonsense. Carnival, festivals, protests, sports, concerts, performing art spectacles, all of them enhance the collective effervescence in their own way parodying socio-cultural reality. (Salgado, Seiça, 2019, pg. 80-81)

Along the same lines, scholars such as Martin and Gavey hint that sometimes that the intent to resist happens at an unconscious level. The provided example is that of woman bodybuilders who could

develop their bodily musculature as a form of resistance against patriarchy or a form of recuperation of their femininity.

Lastly, resistance is also identity-based, placing vernacular dances at the intersection of dance and social and activism.

The next paragraphs will explore various examples of resistance, expressed through dance, as a method for protest, for liberation, for building inclusive communities and forming identities for groups that activate on and off the margins.

### **Dances as visible, politically articulated resistance**

Below are described some geographical contexts where dance becomes a political tool, to draw attention to an oppressed or marginalized community.

#### *Pakistan: Classical Indian dance*

During the early 80'ies dance performances by women were forbidden in Pakistan via a Performing Act Ordinance, being regarded anti-islamist and defiant of the current order. Sheema Kermani, a notorious classical dancer and activist has defied these bans, continuing to perform and to teach classical Indian dance, initiating discussions towards progressive changes in cultural norms and social values. Rekha Pande refers to Keramani's dance as "art as political" and an expression of resistance. ( Pande, 2004, pg. 508-514). In her own words, Sheema Kermani declares that

The discipline of the mind and body and the immense joy which comes with the freeing of the physical form is so incredible. I realized this and decided that in this very rigid and patriarchal society, dance gives me the greatest freedom to not only express but to maintain my body and soul together – to keep my sanity (Fatima, 2020)

#### *New York: Breakdance and Hip Hop culture*

Breakdance is analyzed here as a statement of resilience, affirming the values of the Hip Hop street culture and the life of its marginalized people, who turned to physical strength and emotional flexibility. The dance was born in the 60'ies and 70'ies, in the South Bronx, inside the Afro-American and Puerto Rican communities. Hip Hop culture has 4 pillars: dance (ie. Breakdance, Popping and Locking) DJ-ing (producing and mixing the music beats), MC-ing (ie. making announcements and animating the block parties) and Graffiti (ie. graphical expression of the culture). DJ Cool Herc was among the firsts to introduce extended rhythm breaks and turntable-ism. He was basically playing two record machines with the same record on both, stringing different rhythm breaks together -

elongating the break - creating the foundational rhythms for Hip Hop. He was the one who coined the terms B-girl (break dancer girl) and B-boy - which were the translation into movement of the breaks in the rhythm. Understanding the backdrop of Hip Hop culture is foundational in understanding the act of resistance behind break-dance.

After the second World War, New York saw huge growth economically and demographically. However during the 60'ies, a gradual economic and social decay set in. A lot of sports and industries moved out of New York into more competitive areas. The passage of the federal Immigration Act (1965), increased immigration from Asia, Europe and Puerto Rico. A massive population shift happened from the main city areas to suburbs, resulting in new housing communities. In his book 'Can't Stop, Won't Stop', 2005, Jeff Chang, refers to the politics of abandonment in the late 60'ies and early 70'ies when many whites were relocated from the Bronx to other neighborhoods due to a faulty urban plan to build a Cross-Bronx Expressway. The Black and Hispanic communities that were left behind were experiencing an acute financial crisis, high crime rates and lots of damages stemming from power blackouts which led to destruction and looting. This led to the proliferation of street gangs, who were assuming the leadership of the Bronx area. One of the largest gangs was the *Black Spades*, originally a Black youth organization, that morphed later into *Zulu Nation (1975)*, under the leadership of Afrika Bambaataa. At the time Bambaataa was a key warlord and gang leader. Seeing all the violence and crime unfolding in his community, he had the vision to turn violence into culture. Thus he became a DJ, and founded the Zulu Nation organization, based on the concepts of 'peace, love and unity. The aim of this organization was to end street violence and restore order, evolving from a ruthless gang to a cultural group that was serving its community. "Change was sweeping through the Bronx. Youthful energies turned from nihilistic implosion to creative explosion." (Chang, 2005, pg. 64). Breaking crews and b-boy styles had their roots in gangs and share similarities with these. B-boys and b-girls go to 'dance battles' against other crews, of course without touching each other. They wear specific clothing and have nicknames. The crew is often the substitute of the real family, founded on the key principle of brotherhood and belonging. Breakdance becomes a lifestyle and an alternative path of peace, against the violent backdrop that birthed this dance style.

While political messages are inherent to Hip Hop culture ('fight the power'), there is also a hidden resistance aspect in Breakdance: the body, 'as a canvas of representation' (Hall, 1993, pg. 109), referring to the three black repertoires from which black popular culture draws: style, music, and the use of the body as a canvas of representation. Being subjected to exclusions, injustices and lack of power, often break-dancers exercise their agency by contorting their bodies into various difficult poses, as a sense of control. Breakdance moves are hard on the body and require a lot of training and rigor. They are characterized by lots of inversions (head spins) breaking of the rhythm by holding



different dance poses that defy gravity (freezes), downrock moves which require a lot of upper body strength. The discipline of the body often spills over into the discipline of life and becomes a transgression of oppression.

### **Dance as identity-based resistance for marginalized communities**

Dance is a powerful resource for affirming the identity of socially excluded communities at the intersection of gender and sexuality, race and class.

#### *New York: Vogue and Ballroom culture*

Born in New York, Harlem in the 1960ies, Vogue emerged as subcultural manifestation of the suppressed Latino and African American queer and trans communities. Political in nature, this movement style offered a new language of expression, challenging social frameworks and creating a meeting point for race, gender, sexual differences, showing that these are fluid and constantly evolving. In 1990 the Vogue ballroom scene was brought from the margins into the mainstream through Madonna's song Vogue (1990) and through Jennie Livingston's documentary Paris Is Burning (1990). Vogue dancers narrate, through recognizable gestures and poses, complex notions of identity that contribute to socioeconomic empowerment and the valuation of the LGBT community.

The Vogue movement style took its name from the popular fashion magazine as a mockery reaction to the dominant neoliberal American lifestyle. The dance itself emulates the poses and stylization of the Vogue magazine models and the Voguers are imitating and reenacting pop stars and fashion models as a sarcastic form of resistance but also with a sense of infatuation with the Western ideals of beauty and class. Vogue has three categories: old way, new way, and Vogue femme. A Vogue performance is usually improvised, based on the competitor's response and the reaction of the audience, but it has some sound building blocks (moves) that the performer goes to (catwalk, duckwalk, hand poses, spins, dips) that require stylization, based on each persona. This persona feeds from an auto-biographical gesture, imbued with the realness of the social context in which the actual performers exist. The role of the affect and the personal, contribute to making the persona more memorable, thus enhancing the quality of the performance. Gender performativity represents a core part of these stylized acts of reenactment. The Vogue performer can have multiple gendered selves, which are constructed and communicated with each Vogue performance act.

In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of

the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender. (Butler, 1988, pg.519)

The club or the ballroom space becomes a theatre of operations, that is symbolic and subversive, where the Vogue performers learn to articulate their sexual and political identities. It's a place, with its own rules, that witnesses the creation of a common identity, and 'ballroom' community.

As bell hooks observes in her critical essays collected in 'Black Looks' in connection to the documentary *Paris is Burning*, there is an implied tragedy and sadness "evoked by the willingness of black gay men to knock themselves out, imitating a ruling class culture and power elite, that is one of the primary agents of their oppression and exploitation." (hooks, 2014, pg. 150)

Turning things upside down in a carnivalesque gesture of ritual, Voguers imitate fantasies stemming from the colonial and hegemonic structures, the very ones that have marginalized them, subverting them and giving them a new meaning.

The structure of kinship in ballroom culture is represented by the 'House' (e.g. House of LaBeija, House of Xtravaganza), which represents an alternative family, where the members of the ballroom community find a sense of cultural belonging and a safe space. Houses are led by a mother and a father and can have many children. Together they organize and participate in ball events, where the values and essence of the community are exhibited. The drag balls showcase the competitiveness of pageants (members of the various houses compete against each other) but are also politically charged, challenging the status quo of the LGBTQ community.

The ballroom culture is today an international movement that has been gaining traction and that made the struggles of the LGBTQ community more visible; however, like many subcultures it has been also subjected to appropriation by the mainstream capitalistic cultures.

J. Jack Halberstam states that "most of the interest directed by the mainstream media at subcultures is voyeuristic and predatory", intimating that usually the originating subculture (eg. black and Puerto Rican gay community) is not gaining any social or economical benefits. (Halberstam, 2005, pg.157).

The Vogue community has grown globally. There are numerous Vogue encounters and festivals all over the world. As a political movement expression, Vogue has found a new stage in the Black Lives Matter movement, where ballroom icons raised awareness about the violence and murders that transgender people are exposed to, creating the Black Trans Lives Matters spin-off movement.

In Europe, the Berlin 'Voguing Out' festival has become a recurring meeting point since 2012. In Barcelona the 'Voguing Festival' has been running since 2013, while Paris saw its first 'Cleopatra' ball in 2014. Voguing workshops are currently growing in popularity and have spread also to heterosexual audiences, who attend balls and various other community initiatives. Voguing is now professionally taught as a form of dance in various dance studios. Portugal is currently on the map through the workshops organized by Nala Revlon and Piny Orchidaceae (analyzed in Chapter 4). The danger is that the global appeal of the dance is putting on the back seat the class struggle essence that has birthed this dance.

### **Dance as hidden resistance**

The body in Oriental dances is a site of strength and agency, fighting the dichotomy between the eroticized public perception of the dance and the actual empowerment and sense of belonging that practitioners experience everyday through the practice of oriental dance. The tension between objectification and liberation is at the heart of this dance, both historically and socially.

Oriental dance or belly dance is a genre that comprises movement practices that stem from different geographies from the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa, to the Balkans and Central Asia, but nowadays there are several manifestations in Europe and North America.

Etymologically, Bellydance comes from belly and dance. It is the dance of the belly, a name with the point of reference to anatomy. The name of the genre bypasses the persona of the dancer and focuses on the belly as the center of the body, projecting figments of exoticism onto the act of dancing. The international Encyclopedia of Dance favors the French term 'danse du ventre', resulting from the French colonial presence in Algeria and later Morocco, between the 1850s and 1930s. The term 'oriental dance' is preferred over the term 'belly dance' and or 'danse du ventre' to avoid any colonial or sexist remnants and shifting the point of reference from anatomy to geography.

Unlike musical forms in the Arab, Iranian, and Turkish worlds, this dance complex does not have a classical tradition (i.e., a named vocabulary, an academy, and uniformly named movements) which places this expressive form in the realm of popular culture. (Shay, Sellers-Young, 2003, pg.16)

Each expression of oriental dance is confronted with its own set of resistances, irrespective of the geography in which it is practiced. The following paragraphs analyze various aspects of the struggle that accompany the practice of Oriental dances in its originative regions as well as in its western-centric utterances.

*Raks-sharki (oriental dance) in Egypt*

Throughout its history, Egypt's state attitude towards Oriental dances has been oscillating between absolute bans of the dance (eg. in 1834, ruler Muhammad Ali Pasha banned 'public women' who were either dancers or prostitutes, from Cairo) or the dance being tolerated and heavily taxed as an occupation. This prohibitive vantage point has only changed during the 'Golden Era' of Egyptian cinema and culture (1930-1960), when Oriental dances were also thriving.

Raqs-sharki draws from the social dances of Egypt (Raqs el Baladi) but also from the European social and dance theater (which was adopted in 1926 by Egyptian entrepreneur Badia Masabni), and embodies a mix of aesthetics and techniques, as well as the tension found between the traditional and modern Egyptian society.

While not legally prohibited, Egyptian women are nowadays stigmatized if they professionally or semi-professionally perform Raks-sharki in their own native Egypt, in spite of the fame and respect that performers of this style used to have during its golden times. The 'old days' Raks-sharki performers are still viewed as beloved national icons (i.e. Naima Akef, Samia Gamal, Taheya Karioka). The reverence that was expressed towards these old dance and movie stars, is in complete antithesis with the shaming that the Egyptian society currently attributes to this profession. (Bower, 2021)

Foreign women, who were performing Oriental dances in Egypt (eg. there has been an influx of foreign performers - particularly from Russia), have been prevented at various moments (eg. year 2003) by rulings of the minister of labor and immigration to obtain belly dance licenses. In spite of its non encouraging attitude towards Raks-sharki, the dance is still viewed by the Egyptian regulator as a legitimate commodity, reserved for the local practitioners.

Scholar and practitioner Heather D. Ward offers the historical and political context that lead to the disparaging perception of Raks-sharki, by referencing Shafik and Van Niewkerk's work.

The nationalization of Egyptian cinema (1963), and the professionalization of the Egyptian entertainment industry. From the 1960 onwards. These processes would create a division between 'high' and 'low' art, hardening esteem for the newly established theatrical folk dance companies such as the Reda Troupe, while ensuring the marginalization of Raks-sharki. (Ward, 2018, pg.174)

After Egypt's second revolution (1952), the cultural and political agenda were strongly tied to President Nasser's anti imperialist 'dewesternization' social policies, that were favoring dances that were reflecting indigenous movement qualities of the Egyptian people. It was through this

naturalization process that the hybridized Raks-sharki (that started to include non-Egyptian elements, drawn from the colonizers' cultures) started to be marginalized and be replaced by theatrical folk dance companies (eg. Reda Troupe). These were elevated to high art and equated as the expression of the authentic Egyptian identity. Mahmoud Reda (founder of the Reda Troupe) earned the Egyptian government's respect and was decorated in 1967 with the Order of Arts and Sciences, for representing Egyptian folklore so masterfully. Subsequently, Bellydance transformed into a social stigma.

In present times, not only are women condemned, but there are severe consequences (Knell, 2022) for those who practice this dance form (professionally or amateurishly) overtly. Contemporary Egyptian dancer Aicha Babacar refers to herself as a teacher and not a dancer, because she is 'covered' and unable to perform in any places. (Smith, 2022)

The marginalization of Middle Eastern women as performers, in terms of the cultural and social restrictions, renders them almost invisible as dancers to the rest of the world. Even so, Egyptian women continue their everyday resistance against religious conservatism and strict social norms, by practicing belly dance in gyms and fitness clubs, thus exercising their free will.

In the Middle East, performance of the dance as a professional practice is held in strong disrepute, contrasting with public and elite attitudes in Islamic Java where dance is an esteemed classical art form. This disrepute stems not from prudishness, but rather from Islamic mores that dictate that women must not appear uncovered in front of males who do not stand in proper kinship relation to them. Female public dancers who appear in male (public) space strongly contravene these mores and reinforce the widely held notion that professional dancers are prostitutes. (Shay, Sellers-Young, 2003, pg.16)

### *Oriental dance in North America and Europe*

The exhibition of non-western dances happened in the Global North through a series of world fairs. For instance, the term 'belly dance' first came to America in the year 1893, with the occasion of the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago's World Fair. The fair included many attractions among which also 'The Streets of Cairo', the 'Turkish village', which featured non-western entertainers such as snake charmers, camel rides and also a popular belly dancer named 'Little Egypt'. She was later credited to have introduced the North American continent to the suggestive version of the belly dance known as the 'hootchy-kootchy', to a tune said to have been improvised by Sol Bloom (fair entertainment director at that time). These fairs were the first mediums for the western audiences to receive eastern dancing.

Starting with the 20th century, there have been manifestations of this genre also in North America and Europe, through the orientalist performances of dancers such as Ruth St. Denis and Maud Allan and movie stars such as Theda Barra, who adapted the aesthetics and vocabularies of Middle Eastern dances, and promoted a fabricated, mystical image of the Middle Eastern women (eg. sultry and exotic beauties in scanty garments). These performers reenacted the Oriental dances as a way of resistance and defiance of the Western norms regarding sexuality and the autonomous female identity.

This brings up the issue of reenactment and representation in performative studies. According to scholar Amanda Card, “bodies are also archives. They are of the world, (re)created within the same contexts as the objects they use, the places they inhabit, and the times in which they live.” (Card, 2020, pg.30)

Oriental dancers are using their present bodies to ask questions from the past. They can do so with a claim of authenticity, knowledge and affect and with heightened consciousness on how reenactment practices speak to ethical, political and power issues or, they can rely on the physical and material resemblance through costuming, props and mise-en scene. In both circumstances, the performative reenactment could have evocative powers, generating an engagement with the past for its spectators. However, it's the ‘habitus’, the set of gestures of a particular re-enactor, the body that is imbued with its contemporary reality, that renders these reenactments of past dances only partially.

Nowadays, some of the oriental dance practitioners are trying to reposition the westernized form of belly dance as a unique form with its own narratives of authenticity. However, divorced from its geography of origin as well as from its socio-political context, the dance re-enforces an orientalist view, as it was defined by Edward Said in his seminal work ‘Orientalism’. He asserts that “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had since antiquity been a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences”. (Said, 1978, pg.9)

This construct of the Orient, through textual, visual and archive-building means, was set up with a binary categorization framework in mind (civilized vs. uncivilized, moral vs. immoral, North vs. South) as well as with the preservation of the cultural hegemony of the West over the East.

Even from an etymological point of view, the words for oriental dance (eg. belly dance) attest the western gaze towards the ‘Other’, as well as the attempt to market this dance to western audiences, and constructing exotic identities who bypass the subjectivity of each individual.

The notable contradiction is that the westernized form of Bellydance contributes to its exotic mode of representation, but it also aids its practitioners to challenge the dominant ideologies around the female body.

On the backdrop of the 70'ies second wave of feminism and sexual liberation movements, belly dancers in Europe and North America experienced empowerment through this form of expression, reclaiming their bodies, who became a site of power and admiration. Bellydance was regarded as a liberating, even spiritual, experience for many practitioners. It was perceived also as an antidote against the glorified 'anorexic' body image and the fat-phobia of women, as well as an opposition to the beauty standards imposed by mainstream western culture.

The gender politics within this dance are relevant because the majority of the practitioners are females and because gender issues dominate the oriental dance discourse. Practitioners often struggle with the fact that the genre itself is highly sexualized, thus viewed as disreputable even by the progressive Euro-centric societies. Its performers have been subjected to stereotypes and prejudice, and are often seen as objects by the male gaze. The objectification of the female body through the male gaze, the costuming that re-enacts the Orientalist projection of exoticism, the emphasis on pelvic and hip movements are aspects that come immediately to mind and that are extending the 'Orientalist gaze towards the Other' to western practitioners.

Regardless of the amount of training and technique, lectures and research that come with the practice of Oriental dances, the genre itself is still considered vernacular and overpowered by its sensuous character. "Finally, claims of ancient roots, dances of fertility, and ritual dances for ancient deities lend dignity to a dance genre with obvious erotic and sexual content." (Shay and Sellers-Young, 2003, pg 32)

This embedded dichotomy for how the female body is empowered through practicing oriental dance (physically and spiritually) and how the female body is perceived through a lens of containment by society, creates a tension and a site of resistance among its practitioners.

Countering it's negative connotations, western Bellydance communities are challenging the containment of the female body in western culture, performing an exercise in resistance, and striving to build a new type of gaze (other than the eroticized male gaze of the 'Other'), namely a gaze of equality, understanding and respect.

"While western belly dance reproduces an aestheticized imaginary vision of the East and its women, its popular practice warps the Orientalist frame, by making the dancer the subject of the experience, rather than the object of a gaze." (Dox, 2006, pg.54)

Most of the analyzed dances are situated on and off the margins, as sites of prolific expression and places of collective memory, remembering the socio-political context that generated such practices in the first place, acting as buffers and allowing some distance from the mainstream social and cultural hegemonic practices.

### **About Margins**

The term 'margins' can present multiple valences: the dominant discourse and sociological definition puts margins at the borders of society, neighbors of problematic identities, ghetto, 'the excluded', 'the others'. However for the purpose of this research paper, margins are not to be interpreted as peripheral geographies, but as symbols of local spheres and places of empowerment where individuals (or communities) exercise their agency and human dignity to manifest with confidence in their knowledge and skills their vision for their own life, with respect for difference and diversity. Margins are seen as the contrary vision, as fountains of empowerment and potency (hooks, 2000, Scott, 1992), because the center hinders freedom and is full of patriarchal politics. Marginality is seen here as a center of production of counter-hegemonic discourses.

The struggles against domination sustained by the epistemologies of the South are those that transform any margin of freedom, however small, into an opportunity for liberation, while accepting the risks involved in such a transformation. [...] counter-hegemonic freedom is autonomous and emancipatory. ( De Sousa Santos, 2018, pag.65)

A different perspective on margins, as given by the Brazilian novelist João Guimarães Rosa's in his book from 1962, 'The Third Bank of the River,' is that of margins, seen here as transcendental, liminal spaces, defying certifications imposed by the mainstream center, especially as they pertain to movement practices. The practitioner makes through her/his art a radical gesture of irreversible occupation, that defines the territory of her/his third bank.

Going back to Victor Turner's notion of 'communitas' as an unstructured community, permeated by lateral hierarchy, where its members choose to suspend social conventions or create new ones, as well as to his concept of 'liminoid' - as a 'voluntary transitional phase' (vs. 'liminal' transition, which is non-volitional), vernacular dance communities are viewing margins as islands of freedom in manifestation. Not to mention that the performance of the dance itself on or off stage, on or off the margins, triggers a feeling of expanded possibilities and transcendence as a gateway of exploration of the dancer's personal experience, and thus generating another liminal space.

"In the liminoid genres of industrial art, literature, and even science [...], great public stress is laid on the individual innovator, the unique person who dares and opts to create." (Turner, 1974, pg.75)



Moreover, Turner cites the 'play' theories of order and disorder of Brian Sutton-Smith, where he perceives liminal situations, as situations where the 'default' order is suspended, creating new paradigms and models, being veritable 'seedbeds for cultural creativity'. These new constructs then feed back into the central socio-economic system, alimending it with new aspirations and 'raisons d'être'. These liminal states of being and creating are basically free spaces, outside the social conventions allowing for experimentation through construction and deconstruction, resulting in cultural progress and innovative dance expressions.

Drawing from the work of body philosophers and phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty, during the act of performance, on and off the margins, the body of the performer becomes a vessel that unifies and transcends the psychological and physiological realms. The dancer attains a state of ecstasy and freedom in relation to the world.

The solution of all problems of transcendence is to be sought in the thickness of the pre-objective present, in which we find our bodily being, our social being, and the preexistence of the world, that is, the starting point of 'explanations', in so far as they are legitimate—and at the same time the basis of our freedom. (Merleau Ponty, 2005, pg. 503)

The performers that form the subject of this research, are well aware of both the cultural practices at the margins (represented in this case by the vernacular dances) as well as of those at the center (represented here by the dance styles mainly recognized by art institutions and academy in Portugal: 'classical dance/ballet' and 'Contemporary dance'), acquiring a unique vantage point of both worlds.

A mode of seeing that reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. [...] This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us an oppositional world view, a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity." (hooks, 2000, pg. xvi)

### *On and off the margins*

The observed performers of vernacular dances found comfort and solidarity in their nascent community, which in most cases is a marginalized one, either associated with gender identity matters (eg. the ballroom community) or communities where the practitioners feel objectified and hyper sexualized (eg. the oriental dance community) or communities based on collective resistance and fighting the powers of oppression (eg. the Hip Hop / break dance community). They grew and

innovated within these communities but in a lot of cases they branched out and moved towards more central spaces, subverting them from within and resisting not to be swallowed by the centers. The questions that arise are: What happens to marginal performances that are conducted at the center? How does the performer maintain her/his style ethos, when producing from the center?

Some of the chronicled performers are already taking their art to the Center. Greeted by the colonizing mentality of the mainstream, the performer bears the difficulty of a double resistance: keeping her/his radical views and not buying into the commodification trends of the dance styles and also assuming the role of an interpreter and teacher that explains the dance language and context of the 'other' (other meaning here a marginalized community, or a vernacular dance, or a non-institutional movement practice) to the people they encounter at the center. Some very telling examples of artists that are moving on and off the margins are: Piny Orchidaceae and Nala Revlon.

Piny Orchidaceae, a Lisbon based performer, choreographer, researcher, teacher, feminist and facilitator of mixed practices started her dance career by studying Oriental dances and then later discovering Hip Hop culture. With her friends she created a female Hip Hop crew where they developed their work in dance (Breakdance, Hip Hop, house dance, Popping and Waacking) and graffiti. She also got a degree in Contemporary dance and after many years of practice and many embodied dance styles, she brought her art and performative experience into the cultural institutions of Lisbon and Porto.

One of her recent stage works, 'G RITO', is a co-production with Centro Cultural de Belém and Teatro Municipal do Porto / DDD - (Days of Dance Festival), and is a dance piece about women and the decolonization of the female body, embodying movements that were born in processes of resistance of marginalized social groups. This is an exploration of "the gray areas between struggle and sex, between care and eroticism, between pain and pleasure, dualities that also put the mirror in front of the individual as well as the collective body" (translated into English from the official description of CCB/.G rito website).

When asked how she deals with institutions, erudite dances and patriarchy and whether she occupies any patriarchal spaces, Piny answered that her strategy is to occupy and transform such places from within, outlining that her self-constructed independence allows her to take on such an attitude. The need for validation as an artist by such institutions becomes secondary to someone like her.

Another example is Porto based Brazilian artist, Nala Revlon, who is the driving force behind ballroom and Vogue culture in Portugal, as a performance space geared towards queer people, especially black queer people. She has been spiraling on and off the margins, by teaching weekly Vogue classes in

Porto as well as Vogue workshops all over Portugal. On March 30, 2022 she organized together with Piny Orchidaceae the 'Deities Ball', 'occupying' the Rivoli municipal theater in Porto, as part of the DDD Festival ( Festival Dias da Dança). The Deities Ball is a competition event, specifically dedicated to the LGBTQ community, and such events usually take place in clubs or other similar venues. Hosting this ball in the theater is a big step forward for the emerging ballroom community in Portugal, putting on the radar the birth of this community in Portugal, as well as raising awareness to the struggles that such a community is faced with. As a consequence, this facilitates much needed conversations and questioning from all witnesses and participants. "The Deities Ball is a voguing dance, it is a competition, it is a parade, it is a party, it is a vindication. It is a past and a present of queer communities, especially racialized ones" (Duarte, 2022).

The institutionalization of dances stemming from a struggling community doesn't necessarily mean the absorption of margins into the programming of the center, as a capitalistic commodity and as a token of cultural appropriation.

Even though capitalism's extractive mentality is to co-opt and commodify new radical ideas that express street culture or other underground cultures, often the strategy employed by artists of resistance is to spread their message, ideology and practice by conquering spaces at the Center from within and transforming these into spaces of intervention inside these very institutions. A good outcome that comes from the institutionalization of vernacular dances is its echo-chamber, amplifying effect and that it offers direct access to sidelined cultures and their manifestations, that are often unknown to young audiences.

### Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

#### *In-depth interviews*

In order to support my research inquiries, I utilize the method of in-depth interviews, and I employ the findings, stemming from one-on-one interviews, with nine performers (dancers & choreographers). In-depth interviews represent a foundational methodological approach for investigators that want to learn about processes, values, motivations and behaviors of their interviewees. 'The Long interview is one of the the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory' (McCracken,1988) and it is more efficient than the unstructured ethnographic interview as it diminishes the redundancies that come with looser research processes. It also includes the use of an open ended questionnaire, to maximize the time that the interviewer spends with his interviewees. For the purpose of this research paper, all interviewed participants were provided with a list of questions in advance.

Sarah Pink's 'Sensoriality of the interview - rethinking personal encounters through the senses' (2015) served as my main preparation and inspiration source for the interviews that I've conducted. The interviews had a semi-structured script that was shared with all the participants. The performers that were selected for these interviews were empirically researched for a lengthy period of time. I've established on-going relationships and rapport with most of the performers by attending their dance classes, workshops and conferences that they were part of, and by candidly exchanging views on various relevant issues. The performers were chosen based on a couple criteria: geography, access and the ethics and process behind their artistic fusions. Most of the interviewed artists are residing and developing their dance practices in Portugal. Couple of them consolidated their professional dance careers outside Portugal (eg. France), but have returned to bring back their experience and knowledge into the Portuguese dance scene. One of them lives and choreographs outside Portugal - but is intimately acquainted with the dance reality in Portugal. Almost all the interviewed performers embody and fuse multiple dance styles as their artistic expression. They do this with mastery and the reflection of where the fused styles come from, the rituals and celebrations behind them and also what the dance fusion output wants to convey to the world.

I've tried to transform our interviews into social, affective encounters - where collaboration as well as self- reflection are part of the process.

A sensory approach to interviewing also has sympathies with a feminist approach which, as Rubin and Rubin describe it, 'humanizes both the researcher and the interviewee' and empowers the interviewee by 'allowing people to "talk back" (hooks, 1989) and thus gives

a voice through interviews to those who have been silenced' (2005: 26). This feminist approach also recognizes the emotive nature of the interview, stressing the need for researchers to also be reflexive about their own emotions. (Pink, 2015, pg. 76)

Due to the current covid-19 pandemic, most of the interviews were conducted online (video and audio). However, most performers were known from before to me through workshops, dance intensives and dance festivals. Therefore the impact of having online interviews wasn't as detrimental to the sensorial interview strategy. The interviewees allowed me to record the interviews, to ensure data accuracy when processed later. The video/audio recording method has proven very helpful as I was able to extract and review a lot of meta-data (non verbal cues, body posture, look, voice modulation) that was instrumental in giving context to each interview topic or question.

The interviews ranged from 60 to 110 mins. The interview protocol consisted of open ended questions meant to encourage participants to reply with details and personal color to each question. All participants were provided with the same list of questions in advance and most of them answered all questions during the interview.

I tried to avoid projecting my own analytical subjectivity (eg. what I thought was important to women about the dance, based on personal experience) and the list of questions was compiled with the awareness of the trajectory of each performer and with some preliminary knowledge about the dance vertical that the performer is active within. As Briggs emphasized, "in order to become a good interviewer, the researcher will have to develop some degree of competence in these sociolinguistic patterns." (Briggs, 2012, pg. 95)

There were some questions that spurred more discussions than others. In reality the interview was mostly semi-structured - leaving space for special topics that the candidates wanted to particularly focus on (eg. from the practitioner's dance biography to their social and cultural influences, to their personal forms of resistance). The interview questions are attached to this thesis as Annex 1 and can be freely consulted.

This approach allowed me to better understand the world of the interviewed dancer. The outcome of these conversations is processed and included in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

For the Literature Review chapter, I've researched relevant scholarly texts, but since the analyzed vernacular modes of expressions aren't extensively chronicled by Academia, I've supplemented these texts with sources that stem from industry websites, dance interviews, news articles and other online references.

*Data analysis*

This section only refers to the conducted online interviews. For data analysis purposes, I've extrapolated a technique described by Emerson et al., 2011 and utilized a 3 phase procedure for each of the interviews. First phase was to listen to the video/audio recording and make notes, referred to as the memo writing phase. Secondly, I've returned to a more thorough viewing, identifying themes (eg. the theme of resistance, cultural appropriation, hypersexualization of the dance) and patterns (eg. performer uses dance as a gender affirming tool) called the open coding stage. Finally I've relistened to the interview with these themes and patterns in mind, beginning a rough draft of findings, a stage called focused coding. The gathered data was analyzed inductively, with intentional methodological flexibility in terms of respecting the views, values, beliefs, feelings of the interviewed dance practitioners.

#### Chapter 4. PERFORMERS OF DANCES OF RESISTANCE IN PORTUGAL

This chapter analyzes the vernacular dances that were subverted to the Portuguese reality by their practitioners, stemming from Hip Hop, Vogue and oriental dance cultures. The findings do not reveal how performers of vernacular dances represent the field at large or how they discursively go about defining and or critically think about dance. The next paragraphs present short biographies of the artists that were interviewed, some of their individual colors and personal histories, their local communities, along with some of their views about the world around them. This section does not chronicle the history of the analyzed vernacular dances in Portugal, and only briefly frames the conditions for the genealogy of these dances in Portugal, offering some insights into the roots and emergence of these dances in Portugal, seen through the eyes of the interviewed performers.

The emergence of Hip Hop culture in Portugal was ignited by the mass movements from the Portuguese-speaking African countries, when more than 600 thousand Portuguese returned to Portugal after the 1974 revolution, following the decolonization process. Families of African immigrants ended up occupying Lisbon's commuter districts, forming ethnically segregated social neighborhoods, feeling marginalized politically and geographically. It's safe to say that most of the key members of the Hip Hop movement in Portugal had African origins and cultural roots (eg. Black Company, Boss AC, General D and others), and that the socio-political context they were living in as descendants of African families in Portugal, was dictating their artistic identity. Most of the lyrics refer to the autobiographical everyday life of these music artists.

Anthropologist Teresa Fradique situated the movement of Hip Hop culture in Portugal, especially focusing on the music and multi-culturality aspects of the current. The movement comes as a consequence of the acceleration of urbanization, migratory movements, Post-colonialism and globalization processes, offering through the culturalization of musical expression also a snapshot of Portuguese society. (Fradique, 2003)

Some of the analyzed performers (Piny Orchidaceae, Lúcia Afonso, Eric Santos, Mellisa Sousa and Catarina Campos) represent the younger generations (80'ies and 90'ies decades), who have been involved in the Hip Hop dance scene at various moments of their practice and that have brought Hip Hop dance concepts into their dance fusions.

Nala Revlon is mentioned in connection to igniting the ballroom culture scene in Portugal, creating a safe space for marginalized queer bodies, and bringing Vogue to the Portuguese dance scene as a socio-political manifestation. Catarina Branco, an award winning oriental dancer, choreographer and teacher talks about the transmission of Oriental dances in the Portuguese dance culture during the

past decade and its current perception by the Portuguese society. Inês Pitta (Moony) is an oriental dance fusion artist and talks about her current dance practice in Portugal.

Most of these artists have bridged out and have incorporated vernacular styles and also institutionalized dance techniques into their bodies, thus innovating and expanding the Portuguese dance vocabularies with their specific artistic fusions.

### **Piny Orchidaceae**

Piny is a 41 years old dancer, choreographer and teacher, born in Lisbon in 1981. She lived in Póvoa de Santo Adrião, in Odivelas, until she was 20 and is of Angolan and Portuguese descent (a black mother and a white father). She considers being racially mixed a great trait of her personality because it helped her understand more about herself.

I realize that I really am that daughter of pure colonization. The white grandfather and father who go to work in Angola and have children with black women. A great classic. Sometimes I talk about that because I think in most people who are mixed race, it ends up being the father who is white and the mother who is black. I think it's more common than the opposite, at least in my generation. (Bossuet, 2021, Interview with Piny)

With a degree in Architecture (2007), and a postgraduate degree in scenography (2009) both at the Architecture University in Lisbon, and a degree in Contemporary dance at ESD in Lisbon (2012), Piny is a multi-faceted fusion artist, traveling back and forth from margins to center.

She considers her work being divided into various pillars of focus: performance, creation and choreography, teaching and activism. All these directions have a very strong and common foundation: research. Piny is a researcher at heart and she is passionate about deconstructing and reconnecting culture, people and customs. In her own words:

I think I end up connecting everything. I'm very connected to nature and the state prior to civilization-what is human as an animal being and where we get lost. When I talk, it seems like it's almost always just about dance, and then when I'm done talking, I think it's not just about dance at all, it's about everything. I try not to disconnect the human from the universal energy and to understand that this body is also spiritual, which never ceases to exist." (Bossuet, 2021, Interview with Piny)

Fascinated with Middle Eastern, North African Hellenic and Turkish dances (MENAHT), Piny began her dance career in 1999, when she started her studies in Middle Eastern and North African dances as well as their contemporary fusions (eg. transnational fusion Bellydance). She was eager to research



and understand why so many movement references that are found in North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean Basin, and Iberia share similar traits. To date she continues this type of research, combining the acquired knowledge referring to the cultural contexts of dances with the actual steps, in a way that it can be internalized and understood by all participants: be it via regular dance classes, workshops or dance intensives. When talking to her about oriental dance she associates this style with femininity and female energy.

Wanting to demonstrate her physical strength and ability to her male siblings, Piny looked at other dance styles that are typically associated with male energy. Hence, in parallel with her fascination with MENAHT dance cultures, Piny discovered and immersed herself in the nascent Portuguese Hip Hop and clubbing culture, through dance (Breakdance, house, Waacking, Vogue). Because at the time she was already working and earning enough, she took some trips to New York to learn and understand more about Hip Hop culture, in the geographical cradle it was born. In 2006 she was building one of the first female Breakdance crews (eg. ButterflySoulFlow) in Portugal, breakdancing in Lisbon's subway stations (eg. the Oriente subway station) with her friends - Léo and Lúcia Afonso, gaining the respect of their male peers. Since then, Piny has been juggling with learning, researching and teaching North American urban dances (Breakdance, Hip Hop, house, Vogue, Waacking) and a fusion of these languages all over the world.

She was already embodying these different styles and energies, when she started the Orchidaceae feminine dance collective in 2012. Wanting to blend these different universes together and at the same time to keep her dance friends close to her heart, Piny approached Léo and Lúcia with the idea of creating a collective where street dances are mixed with Oriental dances and Contemporary dances. Initially they seemed reluctant, stating that they would never Bellydance in front of an audience, but afterwards things unfolded positively.

Piny created the collective with the idea of understanding how a female collective works the languages of ancestral pelvic hip movement with a male dance like Breakdance. Another challenge was to integrate gender-affirming dances like Vogue or Waacking with a Contemporary dance that is highly European and formal. The collective's main research focus was to ethically integrate such dance languages. As a hybrid between a crew and a dance company, the Orchidaceae dance collective aimed to blur the boundaries of dance languages and styles. The focus is still on the vocabularies of urban dances, Contemporary dances and ethnic/traditional dances, in a "contemporary context full of ancestry, in a peaceful and constant struggle for equality."

Preoccupied with issues such as sexism, gender inequality and gender roles, Piny imprinted the similar concerns to the Orchidaceae dance collective. So when the Orchidaceae dance collective was invited in 2021 to perform on the main stage of the urban/hip-hop music and arts festival called 'Imminente', the group leveraged the space of the festival to address issues that occur frequently in the urban dance scene: patriarchy (eg. most of the invited rappers and musicians are men) and misogyny (some of their rhymes contained explicitly misogynistic lyrics). Through their mediums of choice: poetry of the words and poetry of the body, the Orchidaceae girls re-signified and reclaimed the word 'cona' as a response to the oppressive lyrics, objectifying the female, by male rappers. Throughout the years, the dance pieces of the Orchidaceae dance collective as well as Piny's solo works have been presented within several festivals in Europe, South, Central and North America and also in several countries in Asia and Africa.

As a teacher, she has been teaching nationally and internationally since 2007, participating at various dance festivals and battles as teacher, organizer and activist, coordinating debates about urban dances, political and social context of dance, Orientalism and cultural and cultural appropriation/appreciation.

Regarding the issue of cultural appropriation, Piny is advocating to her students and dance companions to study the socio-political context of the dance and perform it from a place of respect and understanding of the originating community. One of her biggest teaching products is the 2 weeks long ODI dance intensive, a project that started in 2015. In this program, Piny and the members of the Orchidaceae dance collective review various vocabularies, focusing on technique classes, improvisation exercises, theory classes and historical context, research and creation. They share their vision behind what it means to fuse dance styles and the creation of new movement vocabularies. The movement styles that are taught as part of this program come from Hip Hop, Popping, House Dance, Waacking, Vogue, Fusion Bellydance, Floor-work, Contemporary dance, Capoeira Flow.

Believing in the power of community and visceral experiences, Piny learned some of the dances and movements not in a studio but either on the street or within the clubbing scene (in the cases of urban dances). She went to a formal dance school at 29 years old, when she already had most of these vernacular styles in her body. She talks about Academia as a privilege and as a space to reflect on things. Her studies in formal academic dances (ballet and Contemporary dance) augmented her experience with Hip Hop, Vogueing and Bellydance, teaching her to look holistically at dance and to deconstruct and reconstruct bits and pieces, and arrange them in a harmonious dance vocabulary that has a strong message behind.

Her activist, feministic side, identifying obvious gaps in the Portuguese dance culture ( eg. the lack of queer female creation) urged her to bring other artistic languages and vocabularies, contexts and stories to the stage. One example is the dance play '*HIP. a pussy point of view*' a co-production with the municipal theater in Porto, which premiered at the Festival Dias da Dança and was presented at CCB (Centro Cultural de Belém) in 2020.

The focus of this solo (CCB, 2020) is the hip and through this body part, Piny explores a dance universe from all over the world. She investigates the space of the hip and what it allows for or forbids in both women and men, she reflects about the sexuality behind these dances, which are usually performed by non white bodies, that are and become hyper-sexualized. The dances that are evoked here as rituals, like funeral and wedding dances, can be easily misinterpreted or over-sexualized, and it takes tremendous power to show vulnerability and truth to the nature of dance, which cannot be divorced from its intrinsic sexual character. Piny then asked herself what it means to bring this type of performance, with references in Hip Hop, Vogue and North African dances stemming from non white cultures that are considered non-erudite, in front of white-audiences. For example, the play contains musical references that are deeply embedded in the culture that they represent (eg. To Live Crew | Pop that pussy) that might not be immediately accessible to an untrained audience. This brought up the need of diversifying the topics, the messages and the communities that are represented and reaching the Portuguese dance scene, as well as educating audiences about the different types of struggles and dances of resistance.

Another example of Piny's latest work is the show '*G RITO.*' The play strongly evokes Piny's feminist facet, talking about the female body, colonized in all societies and the need for decolonization and reparation, and the forging of a space that is powerful and pleasurable, decoupled from the hegemonic, patriarchal practices. The time of the play is circular, where the past, present and future are intertwined and the play's territory doesn't refer to any particular geography. Piny assembled a team of eight performers on stage including the light and sound live act. One of the innovative aspects of this play is the collaboration with the sound artist Carincur, configuring a hybrid format between dance performance and a real time electroacoustic sound performance, where the animal energy produced by the dancer is woven in a hybrid work with voice and technology. The music and the rhythms end up having a common memory and being made out of the same fabric and could be placed in any culture of the world.

We look for some voices that are ours and others', because lamenting, crying, carping the weeping, the wailing, the screaming, the singing don't need a territory, they are absolutely transversal in territory, they are absolutely transversal in time and space. We use the voice

of the machine too, in the multiplication of the we in a timeless infinite. (CCB,.G RITO, 2021)

The play questions the traditional and the private ritual spaces, and looks at the stage as a place of transgression and transformation of ritual performativity, of reconfiguration of behaviors, igniting transformation in being or consciousness, occurring in a liminal state of heightened intensity.

The bodies of the 6 dancers provocatively evoke aspects of boundaries: between femininity and masculinity, between ancestry and modernity, between caring and eroticism and sisterhood. Their movements invoke a state of transcendence, where ancestors become visible too. The utilized dance vocabulary is inspired from the various vernacular dances (Hip Hop, Vogue, Bellydance) that were born as a result of a community in resistance, coming together and healing from trauma.

Some of Piny's Contemporary dance creations, developed in parallel with the urban dances and fusions are: *Corpo (i)lógico* (Criadores Emergentes in 2011); *Periférico* (in collaboration with Vhils for BoCA - Biennial of Contemporary Arts); *Sacred Geometry - a meditative State* (for LOOP - Urban Dances Festival); As a freelance performer, she has collaborated with Kwenda Lima, Alice Joana Gonçalves, Francisco, Tiago Guedes, Victor Hugo Pontes, Ricardo Ambrózio, Tânia Carvalho, Raquel Castro, Cristina Planas Leitão and Marco da Silva Ferreira, with whom she has been working since 2011.

When asked about her sense of belonging, she feels that she belongs to the movement and her family of movers as well as to all the communities that she chose to be part of. She mentioned that she believes in a free artistic creation that is socially and politically engaged.

### **Lúcia Afonso (Baronesa)**

Lúcia, capoeirista and dancer, was born in Lisbon, Portugal, but her roots are Angolan. Her grandfather was a musician, playing the guitar and there was always music in Lúcia's house, leaving her with the feeling of music and dancing being part of her heritage. At 8 years old she started studying traditional Portuguese folk dances. Her family was living in the social neighborhood Cruz Vermelha (Lumiar), where a lot of people from Cabo Verde and Angola resided. Through the social work of mestre Petchu, she discovered the traditional dances from Cabo Verde. When she was 10, Lúcia went to the Centro de Artes e Formação (CAF) in Lumiar and was exposed to contemporary and modern dance as well as to Capoeira. Because the neighborhood had pockets of crime, drug abuse and prostitution, Lúcia and her brother were always hanging out at the center after school, because it was considered a safe space. At the age of 12 she started going to all the Capoeira classes that were offered at the center as well as outside to the big main school of Capoeira. This was her and her brother's way to stay out of trouble and protect themselves from the inherent issues that youngsters

their age were going through (drug use, early pregnancy, etc). Lúcia's brother gave her a 1 year membership to the Ginasio Clube Portugues, outside of their neighborhood, where all the masters and promising capoeiristas were training and where they were surrounded by well-off people, so different from the marginalized community of Cruz Vermelha. It was here Lúcia discovered Leo Orchidacee's Hip Hop classes and with 14 years old she began urban dance styles classes.

By 2006 she was part of the ButterflySoulflow all female crew, together with Piny and Leo, participating in her first international battle (Eurobattle in Porto) and deepening her ties to the Portuguese Hip Hop scene, which back in the day meant dj-ing, graffiti (which was illegal) and breakdancing. Outside the dance studios, the b-boys and pretty much everybody from the Hip Hop community were gathering at the Clube Mercado (Lisbon). Even the band 'Buraka Som Sistema' had their start there. The place where Breakdance was taught was at the Alameda metro station on the red line and at gare de Oriente. At that time, ButterflySoulflow was the only female Breakdance crew and slowly they earned the respect of the b-boys. However, Lúcia kept her love and practice of Capoeira and in parallel, with 16 years she started traveling abroad (France, Azores, S Korea, Spain, England) to teach Capoeira and represent her Capoeira school internationally.

Lúcia got a scholarship at 19 years, to attend classes at the dance school (ballet/modern dance/ Irish dance/ Hip Hop) where Piny and Leo were teaching classes, allowing her to be exposed to different dance styles. The director of this dance school suggested that Lúcia should start training to become a professional dancer, but reminded Lúcia that she first needed to finish her high school.

In 2009, Lúcia was 21 years old and decided to follow a professional dance career. She moved to Paris and began professional dance school training at «CHOREIA» studies in: Ballet, Contemporary dance, Modern Dance, Horton and Graham Techniques, Acting, Singing, Dance Composition, Jazz and Musical Theater. At the same time she also did a formal Hip Hop formation at the 'Thony Maskot' school of dance, the first accredited school of street dance in France, where she had the chance to train with first generation of break-dancers (eg. Xavier Pluto), lockers (eg. Junior Almeida), poppers (e.g. Thony Maskot) enriching and elevating her dance vocabulary. During this time she found one of the best teachers of her life, SouSou (Hip Hop teacher) and it was her who pushed Lúcia to bring all her movement background (Capoeira and breaking) into her formal training. Lucia was literally living in the same building with her dance school and was taking it all in.

Through dance competitions, battles (Battle of the Year) dance projects, and regular classes in schools like «Juste Debut» and «Micadanses», she had the opportunity to develop an interest for the fusion of styles and performing.

Since 2011 she has been a Dancer in the French Afro-Hip Hop Dance Company «A Part Etre» in the piece “Revelation” – Performing both a version to be presented to the audience in the streets and a version for Theater, performing for urban dance festivals and street festivals, in several cities of France, Europe and South America.

Returning to Lisbon she became a dancer for the Orchidaceae dance collective. In this timeframe she also met her husband, Dougie Knight and started thinking about developing her local network of dance in Portugal. Together with him, Lúcia created MOS (My Own Style Jam) a jam/battle where all dance styles can meet and jam together, which was hosted during the Orchidaceae Dance intensive.

Moving back and forth between Lisbon and Paris during these years, Lucia started dancing in 2015, for the French Hip-Hop Dance Company ‘Dyptik’ where she had the opportunity to act as a director and choreographer. This became a bit too intense so she looked for other signs that were opening her path. Receiving a Capoeira teaching contract in Paris and after a trip to New York in 2016, in search for the history of house music and dance, Lúcia (re)discovered the connection between Capoeira, the African Culture, clubbing and urban dances in New York City.

In January and February 2017, Lúcia searched for her roots in Bahia, the cradle of Capoeira and the Afro-Brazilian, at the magical city Salvador, Brazil. She began a continuous formation of Afro-Brazilian and Afro Contemporary dance in Bahia, Brazil, doing the ‘Silvestre Training’ with the teachers Rosângela Silvestre and Vera Passos. These teachers changed something in her, making her believe in herself as a well rounded artist that has multiple styles in her body. They made her realize that she wanted to explore more with bringing Capoeira into her dancing, because this movement has been with Lucia since she was a little girl. She realized that she was always exploring the things that ‘the others’ wanted and not what she wanted.

Returning to Lisbon, she and Dougie got married. She realized that it would be difficult for her to be a professional dancer in Portugal, when all the opportunities were presented in France, so there was a struggle for a while to figure this out. When asked about the Portuguese dance scene, she replied that there is a systemic lack of opportunities and a limiting view over what dance is. First is the access issue: in Portugal there are only a couple government accredited dance schools, and one can either go to classical dance (ballet) or contemporary. The current institutional dance view in Portugal defines ‘Contemporary dance’ as a set of techniques that live inside modern dance, and all the ‘in between’ techniques and styles are left out. Another problem is that in most cases, the same set of antiquated people are getting the bulk of the cultural grants, excluding newcomers and/or radical approaches. An artist can be recognized in Portugal only if he/she becomes known outside of

Portugal and then returns (eg. as in the case of dancer and choreographer Marco da Silva Fereirra who at first won international dance battles, became associated artist in Centre chorégraphique national de Caen in Normandy, and only afterwards became known in Portugal). She feels that the entire system needs a good shake: from the cultural policies that recognize and aid the development of various dance forms, to content curators that encourage diversity in content and performers, to dance school infrastructures and production teams.

While back in Portugal, Lucia supported herself by giving dance classes, but she felt lost and without a purpose and even thought about quitting dance. In 2019 she went to Oslo to visit some dance friends and then went to Amsterdam and won the 'House Dance Forever' dance competition - which changed her perspective about dancing again.

She traveled with Piny to Senegal to learn traditional dances and experimental flows at Ecole des sables, but their expectations were not met. That said, the experience validated Lucia's confidence that she has all this information in her body and that she has all the tools and processes at hand to deconstruct and reconstruct movement to create masterful fusions. Meanwhile, the dancer Ella Mesma invited Lucia to be part of her piece in the UK. She spent 2 years there being part of Ella Mesma's dance company.

One of the things that Lucia sometimes does to be able to support herself, is to do kids shows in Dubai/Oman/Saudi Arabia, dressing up as characters from Disney movies (she was King Julien from Madagascar and Masha from Masha and the Bear). These types of experiences made her curious about anthropology.

When the pandemic started, Lucia went from being more in her body to being more in her head and started her studies in Anthropology at the university in Lisbon. These studies enabled her to reflect upon her vast dance experience and question why things are happening the way they are happening.

She and her husband decided to also develop social projects related to dance and culture as both of them come from social neighborhoods, with the aid and partnership of the Lisbon city hall. They didn't want to open yet another dance school but a cultural space (My Own Space), where neighborhood kids can learn about Hip Hop culture, from guest teachers that Lucia and Dougie are inviting. Along the lines of this project, they've also opened 'Incubadora', a space dedicated to creative choreography projects and performance, aimed at young members of My Own Style Espaço Artístico or other entities involved. They managed to broaden the access and take marginalized communities on a process of cultural discovery and artistic practices on stage, turning Hip Hop into a contemporary language in a common space.

Currently Lúcia is teaching Capoeira, Break Dance, House and Hip-Hop for social projects and Lisbon dance and circus schools (Chapitô).

### **Éric Santos**

Éric is a 28 years old professional dancer and entrepreneur, born in 1994 in Coimbra, because there wasn't a maternity ward in Pombal. He was born with a female biology and was attributed the female gender, but for a long period, he related to non binary gender identities. He lived in Pombal until he turned 18 (in 2012) and he speaks of it as a city with a conservative mentality. Éric (back in the day Érica) came out as a lesbian person when he was 12 years old, remembering vividly the physical and psychological discrimination that he suffered in school, due to Pombal's closed off mentality. He remembers waiting to turn 18 so that he could live somewhere else and start developing as a person. The family was kept in the dark about the Pombal days, because Éric chose not to tell them and because he was good at hiding his emotions.

Éric found Hip Hop to be a good medium to express all the unsaid words through his body. Hip Hop was also like a protective shield, earning him respect from the guys that used to beat him up, who were now asking him to teach them Hip Hop moves. Eventually, he found a Hip Hop group in Leiria and started going to battles all over Portugal with them. Battles were his way to affirm his masculinity and express the frustration and struggle of growing up queer, in an uptight small town. In his own words: "when you go to a battle and you win, it's like: ok, maybe I am someone". Even the language used during the Hip Hop battles was more masculine (sup' bro) and was making him feel more comfortable. The battle environment was conducive to a more political and social affirmation attitude for Éric, who was hurting and just wanted to speak through Hip Hop. Dance was for him during that time a core resistance. It was at one of the battles in Leiria when Éric saw two female Hip Hoppers and b-girls, who became at that time his role models in Portugal. They were Leo and Piny from ButterflySoulFlow in Lisbon. Other references in Éric's Hip Hop style development were Alessandra Almeida (Shana) and Soni Boom (who taught 'Locking' techniques). Talking about Hip Hop nowadays, Éric mentioned it's more about classes (studio classes) than street learning. Around 2006 there was a limited number of Hip Hop classes at the gyms and Youtube was just starting. To learn Hip Hop, one needed to go to specific places and streets. For instance Éric had to take a bus from Pombal to Leiria to train with the Hip Hop community there, which he didn't know at the beginning. It's different from today, where you go to a specific dance studio and just pay for a class. To date, people still train at the 'miradouro' Portas do Sol or at Gare de Orient in Lisbon, some because of lack of finances, some just to keep the spirit alive, but meanwhile a multitude of dance studios were born, that offer urban dance classes and Hip Hop.



Éric moved at 18 to Lisbon and attended ESD (Escola Superior de Dança) replacing the battles with ballet and Contemporary dance. According to Éric, he chose dance, because it was the only thing he wanted to do and he chose ESD because it was the only school that was giving a degree in dance. He experienced some sort of gender dysphoria when exposed to ballet, with female centered costuming and its strict first year teachers, who were teaching the foundations of ballet, as an introductory way to Contemporary dance. The next at ESD were more focused on Contemporary dance, thus seemed more inclusive and accessible. During his last year at ESD, Éric also started taking outside dance classes. He talked about the classes with Gustavo Oliveira, a Brazilian-Portuguese Contemporary dancer and choreographer, who inspired him with his strength and masculine energy. Reflecting back he realized that through his formation at ESD he attained a well-rounded view and expanded his dance persona and started perceiving himself as a fusion artist and not solely as a Hip Hop dancer.

After ESD, in 2015, Éric started bar-tending at nights and discovered the gay night scene of Lisbon by working in LGBTQ discos such as 'Trumps'. He discovered more about himself and his position within the LGBTQ scene. He realized that if he was projecting a more feminine persona, he would be able to fit better into the hierarchy of the queer night life, whether its by selling drinks, organizing parties or opening his own lesbian bar. During the interview Éric mentioned that he is really good at building characters and transforming himself, which he also considers a characteristic of the gemini zodiac sign. However mutable his personality, he realized that being 'girlie' wasn't his real side and it started bothering him.

Éric is currently doing a chemical transition based on testosterone towards the male biology and he feels that this will not necessarily turn him into a masculine person, but it will allow him to be more in touch with his feminine side. He sees dance during his biological transition as a form of resistance. Through this change in biology, his body is becoming political, social and not to mention physical. He questions how the new hormones will be transforming his body, and movement. The way he moves his body feels at times as the sole thing that he can control, in a confused world.

In her Phd work about 'The Power of Dance: Health and Healing', scholar Judith Lynne Hanna references medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman at Harvard University, who emphasizes that "dance for some people may provide a feeling of control that minimizes the sense of helplessness and fear related to fear as well as promotes motor functioning." (Hanna, 1995, pg.3)

Eric has the conviction that his envisioned mastectomy will turn his body into a political one. However he considers this as being part of the healing process that he embarked on since his battle time. He also mentioned the need to surround himself with like-hearted people from the transgender

dance community, and talk about all these processes of self realization as a trans person, that bring healing and a way to reconnect the mind with the body.

This resonates with postmodern choreographer Anna Halprin's dance therapy approach, where she assumes that the individual performer is unfinished, and only with limited creativity, due to the various tensions and traumas that are harbored in the body.

In order for this person to reach his/her potential, he/she must undergo "therapy," understood as a process through which his/her psychological and physical blocks are faced and hopefully overcome. [...] The result is personal growth ("each person is his own art") and the ability to perform a new "dance. (Jean and Deak, 1976, pg.50)

In parallel with developing his nightlife character, he was teaching dance classes and was also active in a semi professional dance company. Eric mentioned juggling multiple jobs while living in Lisbon, and forgetting at times to eat. He battled some health issues related to anemia and started taking vitamin supplements, which brought things back to normal, and also turned later into a business. Eric's entrepreneurial spirit is on the mission to solidify his vitamin business as a plan B for when his physical dance time will reach its limit.

In 2017 he started being more serious about dance and started his collaboration with the choreographer and dancer Marco da Silva Ferreria, whom he got to know during an artistic residency that Marco organized in Montemor-o-Novo. Eric is presently one of the dancers that are part of 'Pensamento Avulso', the creative choreographic structure of Marco da Silva Ferreira, participating in various stage shows (eg. *Bisonte*, *Siri*) in Portugal and internationally. He credits Marco to be one of the innovative choreographers who brought Hip Hop into the Portuguese theater. In 2020 he even worked with the dancers of Companhia Nacional de Bailado' and rendered the piece called 'Corpos de Baile'. Marco is utilizing Hip Hop concepts such as isolations, being very fast and holding a movement, the feeling of a robot or hybrid body - into all his contemporary creations. His shows are like concerts interwoven with Hip Hop moves, where the gender and bodies are very fluid. His archetypes (eg. *Bisonte*) seem strong but are also very loving and sensitive. The dancers that are part of his creations, sometimes also play music on stage (Eric played the drums in *Bisonte*). Eric is happy to be part of this dance adventure that is opening the doors for Hip Hop / contemporary fusion in Portugal.

During the pandemic, Eric experienced an emotional upheaval, left Lisbon and moved back to his family's house in Pombal. Things didn't get better because Eric was intending to do his transition, and his parents weren't aware, leading to a toxic moment in his life. It coincided with all professional

dancing being on pause for almost half a year, so Eric was spending time dancing at home in his bedroom, utilizing dance as a tool for healing. When things opened up, in 2021, Eric moved to Porto and started his transition and healing.

### **Mellisa Sousa**

Mellisa, is a 32 year old Porto-based dancer and choreographer and was born in 1991 in Valencia, Venezuela. At 17 she moved to Caracas to be closer to dance, where she met the b-boy crew 'Speedy Angels', an iconic crew known throughout Latin America. She was training in various street styles with them (6 to 7 hours per day) and was watching them in battles, thus developing practice discipline and focus. In 2010, with 19 years old, she came to Portugal to Eurobattle with the Speedy Angels. She considers herself lucky to have made her first contact with such a supportive dance community. This disciplined state of mind and vision of community she took with herself and tried to find outside as well.

Later she realized she needed to develop her academic dance training (ballet and Contemporary dances) and enrolled in UNEARTE (Universidade Nacional Experimental das Artes) in Caracas, which jump started her dance career. She started applying for dance programs outside of Venezuela, because it was unsafe at the time to live in Caracas and she received a scholarship to a dance school in New York (Peridance Capezio Center).

Talking about the Hip Hop community in New York, Mellisa mentioned she was trying to connect with the scene by going to Hip Hop and house parties, where big names such as Buddha Stretch, Henry Link, Marjory Smarth were dominating the scene. The main goals for the Hip Hop dancers in New York were to be seen at these parties and build networks to further their art. Getting depressed with the lifestyle and discriminatory environment of New York's Hip Hop scene, feeling more like a guest in the culture, and sensing that the margins were losing their edge, Mellisa decided to move to Portugal when she turned 22.

In Porto, the access to the Hip Hop scene was through battles or organized jams. Almost all the members of the community were naturally divided into crews, and people were basically hanging out in the microcosmos of their own crew. Since Mellisa was a newcomer and didn't have a crew, she felt a bit lonely and disconnected. When invited to judge Hip Hop battles in Porto, she felt slightly judged by the Hip Hop community because at that time people didn't know anything about her dancing. Thinking about the community in Lisbon (Leo, Piny, Lucia) with whom she sometimes trained, she felt that they had built their own great universe, very far from hers. She speaks of Lucia Baronesa as one of the most invested members of the Hip Hop community in Lisbon.

Realizing that the Portuguese urban dance scene is missing a dedicated space, in 2017 Mellissa co-created with Catarina Campos the LOOP festival in Santa Maria da Feira. This was a pioneer festival in Portugal, focusing on street and club dances, with the mission of giving emerging choreographers the opportunity to experiment with ideas, develop research and expose creations through vocabularies such as Breaking, Hip Hop, House, Locking, Popping, among others, in a pure approach or crossed with other contemporary artistic expressions. Thinking abstractly, the LOOP festival, which had so far three in-person editions and one digital edition, brought together the two nodes of power in the Portuguese Hip Hop scene, the South (Lisbon) and the North (Porto) towards the center. Currently the festival is on a reflective pause, and Melissa is focusing on her own dance formation as a stage interpreter.

Melissa reminded that Hip Hop and house come from a culture of protest, and social unrest. Every dance style applies a different role: ballet is about social etiquette and academic conversation, Contemporary dance evokes the current of existentialism, whereas in Hip Hop there is a visceral, emotional engagement with the body and the whole identity is a protest about the world. This provides Hip Hop with a power and an advantage that the dancers can draw on when performing. All of the dances within Hip Hop culture occupy their own space and this is also undeniably visible in the body of the person. She feels that this special aura of Hip Hop conflicts at times with the need of commodification and business that comes with this style, and here is where the fragmentation happens. She feels that currently the Hip Hop and house community are a bit fragmented, based on various egos (everyone wants a name inside of the industry) who want to assume leadership roles and defend their piece of the pie, and even if it is a rich, prolific environment, she feels that at times it can also be toxic. If you dismantle and take away all these layers, the most important thing that remains about Hip Hop is the social message of struggle, translated into the body.

As a performer Mellissa had professional experiences with Sandrine Lescourant (Mufasa), Dana Foglia, Ladies of Hip Hop, Alvin Ailey school Jorge Gonçalves, Joclécio Azevedo, Catarina Campos and Marco da Silva Ferreira. Co-creator of 'Bownd' (2018) and the creator of 'En el vacío' (2017). In 2021 is a dancer in 'Bate fado' from Jonas & Lander and in 'Especlar uma coisa entre nós' by Jorge Gonçalves.

Talking about the concept of resistance, she associates the background that she carries as an immigrant to a form of resilience:

In her own words: "The journey made me naturally develop an adaptive "anticorp" as a mechanism for emotional drop falls, and also in order to adjust to a different model of social and economic environment. This all influenced the way I perceived and approached an underline of movement that I would later on developed as a language for communication."

**Catarina Campos**

Born in Porto and raised in Santa Maria da Feira, Catarina is a 36 years old dancer and choreographer.

She wanted to become a soccer player but back in the day, there weren't any girl clubs for soccer, so she turned to dance. At 12 she started learning Hip Hop by watching videos and copying the moves (through MTV). She didn't learn Hip Hop by emerging herself into the roots of the culture (graffiti, street dance, DJ-ing) but she felt a connection to the music and to the aesthetics of the style. She participated in choreographic dance championships (All About Dance) that also drew inspiration from Hip Hop and house styles. Eurobattle was the first event that exposed Catarina to the heart of break dance and street styles.

Regarding the Hip Hop community in Portugal, Catarina referred mostly to the Lisbon based core: Jandira Baptista, Lúcia Baronesa, Dougie Knight, Comics, Concept, that were still practicing on the street at Gare de Oriente, keeping the authenticity of the culture alive. Similar to her friend and dance partner Melissa Sousa, she too felt at times inadequate or not having a sense of belonging in the Hip Hop community. In this respect, Catarina resonated and paraphrased the house and Vogue dancer Joana Matos, who during a debate organized by LOOP festival, was saying that the contemporary Hip Hop community in Portugal feels a collective pain, that has to do with racism, ethnic segregation and a sense of belonging and territorial-ism and that it's not up to one person to bring healing.

She also brought up the fact that there are many white allies to these street styles, who are nurturing and beneficial to propagating the existence of these styles, but who are sometimes not recognized.

A big internal shift happened when Catarina stopped dancing to pursue a career in architecture. She soon realized that architecture wasn't her path so she quit her job, moved to Paris to seek dance inspiration. She enrolled in schools such as 'Flow' dance academy and 'Juste Debout', where she had a huge opening, even if she already had 15 years of dance under her belt. She learned the foundations of Hip Hop and attended workshops with known Hip Hop masters (eg. Henry Link). Even if she learned about a whole new world, the underlying realization was the commodification trend that was happening in Hip Hop culture, which was especially visible to the people from outside the culture, who were paying a lot of money for access to dance classes. She felt that the margins as an art system have changed, but that the underlying identity of oppression still remained.

Continuing her Hip Hop dance quest she traveled with Mellissa to New York to research more about the roots of the culture. At the end of this process she came to the conclusion that she didn't feel the connection that she was seeking. She perceived Hip Hop as a predominantly masculine style and felt

more connected to the dances that triggered her feminine side, such as house, Waacking as well as Contemporary dances.

She speaks of her long term resistance through practicing dance as her main profession in Portugal, and still feels that to this day there are a lot of moving pieces of the puzzle that somehow need to be assembled. She thinks that her dance path would have been slightly different if she hadn't been dedicating so much time to urban dances, which in Portugal are still regarded as 'unprofessional' or secondary. Grant givers, sponsors or other types of financial aid are more inclined to invest in projects related to contemporary or classical dances, which are considered reliable.

However, now, on the backdrop of all the recent social and political movements (eg. BlackLivesMatter, climatic migration) vernacular dances such as Hip Hop are traveling from the margins to the center. A tokenization trend (eg. including more people of color or queer people in performances) is unfolding under the guise of diversity, and content curators and donors, especially from the Global North, started becoming more receptive. In this respect, Catarina mentioned a very recent example: the open call for urban dancers made by French choreographer Boris Charmaz.

Catarina talked about stage productions, blending Hip Hop and house concepts with Contemporary dances and the process behind it, as a way of innovating the movement, as well as about the reluctance of certain artists that come from a Hip Hop background, to try these fusions, in an attempt to maintain the purity of the style. Along the lines of experimentation and movement research, Catarina and Mellissa co-produced with Teatro Municipal do Porto Rivoli (within the Unstable Stages cycle) a duet called 'Bownd'(2021, Teatro Rivoli), a dance piece based on the search for movement linked to the universe of boundaries and human relationships, utilizing a contemporary urban dance language that embraces hip-hop and house vocabularies, as well as the movement rooted in each of their backgrounds. The movement in this dance play comes as a natural consequence and isn't strictly pre-defined to match certain feelings or storylines. The essence about human interactions is conveyed through various dance styles, which in this dance piece are becoming a medium, a tool of expression and not the main preoccupation of the creators.

Other notable projects of Catarina: she is the creator of the training program Your Hip Hop Dance and Identity. She is a dancer in Sandrine Lescourant's choreographic laboratory and in Philippe Almeida's Devices. Co-creator and dancer of 'Tres pas sar' (2016), 'Querencia' (2017). Dancer in |F| of Orchidaceae Dance Company and 'Expedição' (2019) of Mara Andrade. Creator of 'Pelo menos 77'. (2019). Performer and dancer at Jonas &Lander 'Bate fado' (2021).

In March of this year, Catarina and Melissa organized an artistic dance residency at 'O Espaço do Tempo', located in Montemor-o-Novo, where they presented their latest creation 'Playground', which emerges from the experience of outdoor playing. The dance comes from the game and the game comes from the dance.

### **Nala Revlon**

Maria Teixeira, wrote in an article dated 5 Aug, 2019 that Portugal has no ballroom/Vogue dance scene (Teixeira, 2019, Lescorpsdansants). This all changed through the work of Porto based, Brazilian artist Nala Revlon and Lisbon based Piny Orchidaceae. They identified a huge gap in the Portuguese queer dance scene, and decided to jumpstart the ballroom scene in Portugal, creating various safe spaces for the affirmation on queer, marginalized bodies, allowing them to find expression through dance and music.

Nala came to Portugal when she was seven years old and she's been moving her entire life. She believes that it's part of being Brazilian that music and dance come easy to her, because there is a lot of artistic stimulation going on in the streets, on TV (samba, passinho). Her maternal side is black and comes from an indigenous tribe in the Amazon region and her father's side is white. Building her individuality was at times confusing, because of her mixed identity: she perceives herself as black, but because of her light skin tone she was not always considered black, nor white. She believes that certain legacies stick onto one's DNA, like certain walks, movements or gestures, that were passed on by one's ancestors.

She started developing her dancing professionally when she was 15 (working in a dance company and then giving classes). She started with Hip Hop and then went to explore the clubbing dance scene (Waacking, Disco, House), also because these dance styles were en par with her upbeat energy. Around 2012, the Portuguese Hip Hop community wasn't too developed at that time and was dealing with fragmentation issues, so for her it became highly un-motivating to be part of it.

In 2017 Nala was 20 years old and decided to move to Paris to explore other dance styles. It was there where she learned and lived ballroom culture, becoming part of the House of Revlon and the Kiki House of Wang, forging her path in the European ballroom scene, through major balls and kikis. She walked in her category (Women's Performance and Female Figure) in Paris, London, Berlin or Rio de Janeiro, with international grand prizes and juries.

Nala mentioned that this process was a healing tool for her, because the entire time she lived in Portugal she felt racism and sexism happening in every layer of the social fabric, feeling that the colonial past is still present. She thinks that racism and homophobia in Portugal are more undercover

than in other big metropolises, thus more difficult to address. In a very big attempt to integrate, she did a lot of things she is conscious about (from straightening her hair and putting chemicals in it, to being very private about her sexual preferences). Ballroom culture allowed Nala to become vocal about socio-political issues that were directly affecting her community of choice (racism, homophobia, transfobia). A Vogue community is so much more than a dance community. Political in nature, the voguing community is based on race and gender. She explains that the Stonewall riots, triggered the gay liberation movement in the twentieth century fight for LGBT rights, thus helping also Vogue communities to proliferate. The house/family structure in Vogue culture subverts the patriarchal role of the house and family in our current society. Nala is raising kids in the Portuguese Vogue community and is considered their mother.

Coming back to Portugal, Nala said she immediately connected to Piny Orchidaceae and they started thinking about how to bring elements from the Vogue culture in Portugal in a correct and ethical way, meaning they started by recognizing that they need to bring people from outside Portugal to teach local audiences about the format and movements of ballroom culture. In Vogueing there is a rule: to teach you need to be part of a community, and since in Portugal there wasn't a community at the time, neither Nala nor Piny could fit this role.

In 2021 Nala and Piny managed to organize the first Vogue ball in Portugal with judges from the international community and categories, thus creating the first Portuguese chapter (Pacheco Miranda, Durães, 2021), as a place of resistance for the black, queer community but not only limited to it. She explains that ballroom culture started as a divisive culture with the white drag races that were excluding the black contestants from winning competitions and were demanding black contestants to whiten their appearance to help their chances. It was Crystal Labeija who denounced this discriminatory system and started hosting balls just for black queens. Nala's progressive nature sees inclusivity and openness as core values and inviting other allies into the community, but is firm about the history, origins and position of each member of the ballroom culture. Currently there are 3 houses in Portugal, and the community is growing fast. That said, the majority of the community members are foreigners, especially from the former colonies.

Nala is organizing talks and debates meant to shed some light about the history and the essence of the ballroom community and spur uncomfortable conversations related to racism, patriarchy but also empowerment, resistance and change in society. The willingness to talk and address issues is a positive trend that is observed both live and in social media, creating a more transparent environment.



Also the issue of representation on stage of people from the former colonies, blacks, queers is changing for the better, whether it's just a social trend or not. It took a while for ballroom culture to reach Portugal and Nala thinks it's mainly because of the deeply rooted attitude towards arts not being an essential part of life. "I think we are at this stage of giving voice, of giving space to all these manifestations that have always been highly peripheral and segregated. It's much more than a dance. It's a whole community of life" (Piny Orchidaceae). Nala's successes were crowned with the Deities Ball, held in Porto at Rivoli Municipal Theater, which meant expanding the ballroom culture into the Portuguese art institutions.

### **Catarina Branco**

Catarina is a 29 year old dancer, choreographer and teacher, based in the city of Setúbal. As a little girl her mom oriented her towards classical dance and Hip Hop classes. But when Catarina turned 16 years old, she fell in love with Oriental dances, and has continued to research and to practice this dance discipline ever since. Even if in 2010 Catarina went to Business school, she went in parallel to the 'Dança Livre' dance school in Lisbon, to study Oriental dances with Sara Nadira (Pereira, 2019), a well known performer and teacher, who studied Oriental dances with Joana Sahira, one of the most notorious oriental dance teachers and performers in Portugal. Joana Sahira specializes in Egyptian Oriental and Folkloric Dance, and she lived and studied many years in Cairo, Egypt.

In 2014 Catarina started traveling internationally, to several large oriental dance festivals to hone her art by competing in various oriental dance competitions. Empowered by these experiences, Catarina started teaching oriental dance on a regular basis. This gave her courage to quit her job in 2017 and dedicate her full time to Oriental dances.

In 2019 she opened her own dance school in Setúbal, which is solely specialized in the study of Oriental dances. The goal is to create a high quality learning environment, structured on the assimilation of multiple levels of dance abilities, and up to a professional level. To give the students an overarching view of the positionality of Oriental dances in the dance landscape, the school promotes cross disciplinary knowledge between Oriental dances and classical dances (origins, history, developments, performance). Hence the school offers oriental dance theory classes, where several book-readings are disseminated.

Talking about how oriental dance is perceived in Portugal, Catarina mentioned that in comparison with the classical or contemporary disciplines, oriental dance is seen as less elevated and even provocative. There are families that she came across that mentioned that they wouldn't send their

kids to belly dance school, in favor of ballet schools, which are the preferred dance studies, among regular families.

An example illustrating the hierarchization of dance styles, stems from Catarina's teaching world: as an oriental dance teacher at a dance school that was focusing more on conventional dance disciplines (eg. contemporary and Jazz dance styles), she was preparing together with her student body, for a collective dance showcase. Each dance style represented at the school was allotted a specific slot on the rehearsal schedule. The dancers stemming from the Jazz discipline spilled over into the schedule slot of the oriental dance group. According to Catarina, this behavior stemmed from an attitude of entitlement, because the other group felt that their dance discipline (Jazz) represents the more prominent style. Oriental dances were considered more recreational and not a style to aspire to. This attitude left the oriental dance students feeling belittled and unimportant in their art form. This vantage point towards Oriental dances being a 'recreational' style, was also reflected in the pecuniary compensation that Catarina received for her oriental dance teaching hours. Her compensation was lower than the one of the Jazz, or Contemporary dance teachers.

When asked about the frail representation of Oriental dances in Portugal, Catarina explained that the orientalist mentality of western cultures, which as E. Said described in his work, romanticizes and associates the oriental 'other' with mysticism and eroticism, is very prevalent in Portugal.

Additionally, she outlined that oriental dance is at core a solo performance, where usually the performer dances alone on stage. The overpowering femininity of the dance can be intimidating for untrained audiences (regardless of gender), and Catarina feels this challenges the underlying patriarchal mentality of her current social environment. She mentioned that this puritan view is also lent to other dance styles, mostly exotic dance styles, such as pole dance and burlesque, that are also executed individually, and in most cases by females. She thinks that Hip Hop and other urban dances are regarded with less prejudice than Oriental dances.

In her quest of becoming a well rounded Raks-sharki dancer, Catarina was exposed and inspired by various oriental dance styles. She talked about dance expressions stemming from Eastern Europe (Russia and Ukraine). Her favorite performer is Russian oriental dancer Aida Bogomolova, who she thinks is very versatile, as she performs all the sub-styles within Oriental dances (eg.romantic, saidi, tahtib and so on) and a true 'natural' in her movements. She mentioned learning from her within several dance intensives. Catarina appreciates the classical elongated lines or Russian performers, the turns and the positions in relevée, and the way these performers move through and occupy the dance space.

To better understand the culture, ancestry and geography of the dances, Catarina traveled to Egypt and studied with local artists such as Sahar Samara (dancer in the Tito Seif 'folklore troupe), from whom she learned folkloric dances such as 'saidi' and Randa Kamel, one of the most popular dancers and choreographers in Egypt, with powerful moves and dramatic technique. From Khaled Mahmoud she learned about hip accents and movement controls.

Catarina feels closer to the Egyptian dance style, which is more grounded through the flat footed moves and the earthy hips - because she feels that this style better compliments her natural abilities.

When asked about her opinion with regard to muslim conservatism and the continuation of Oriental dances in Egypt through a younger generation of Raks-sharki teachers, Catarina mentioned that unfortunately, there aren't many oriental dance schools (public or private) in Egypt and as consequence there aren't that many young Egyptian oriental dance teachers in the dance landscape. Catarina mentioned hearing first hand from Dina (the famous Egyptian belly dancer and actress) with whom she was taking a workshop in 2019, how the Egyptian Bellydance market is transforming due to the increased presence of Russian and Ukrainian belly dancers in Egypt. Catarina also observed a drop in the skills of the local, Egyptian dancers, in comparison to the Russian and Ukrainian dancers that have relocated to Egypt.

Talking about the Eastern European school of Oriental dances, she mentioned that these schools are specialized oriental dance schools, with a structured curriculum and a rigorous discipline, which enables its students to outperform the Raks-sharki performers in Egypt. Catarina feels that the dance style is currently more developed outside of Egyptian geography.

She also talked about a social paradox that is happening currently in Egypt: on one hand the appreciation of the Raks-sharki style as a nationalistic heirloom, and an important part of the Egyptian cultural heritage and on the other hand the disparaging of the dance style due to the strict social norms and the outside dancers that have appreciated but also appropriated this dance form.

When interviewed about the Portuguese oriental dance scene, Catarina mentioned it's a very young scene, started by a German expat in the 90'ies, who taught Joana Sahira, one of Portugal's most known oriental dancers, who then in turn started to spread this dance art towards multiple other local dancers.

She also drew attention to one of the media catalysts of Oriental dances in Portugal, namely the Brazilian soap opera 'The Clone', who's main character was occasionally belly dancing, thus bringing Oriental dances into the foreground, for Portuguese audiences.

During the decade 2000-2010, Bellydance became fashionable in Portugal and classes were taught at various accessible locations such as community centers and gyms. According to Catarina's first teacher, oriental dance teachers had a much higher average number of students attending their dance classes than what is happening today, amounting up to 50 students per class. Some of these teachers were even invited to produce high quality oriental dance DVD's, which would then be sold at the local supermarkets. After the year 2010, Portugal saw a downward trend in oriental dance audiences.

Approaching the subject of teaching methodologies, Catarina feels that the current oriental dance teaching style has evolved, taking a more holistic perspective, thus enabling the students of this dance discipline to learn more about the different styles that live under the Oriental dances umbrella and offering them information about the historical and social context, of how these styles transformed and progressed.

Among the Portuguese performers and teachers that inspire her, Catarina talked about Piny Orchidaceae as one of the innovative fusion dance artists in the Portuguese dance landscape, and acknowledged Piny's understanding of MENAHT cultures dance folklore.

On the subject of oriental dance festivals in Portugal, she mentioned the 'East Fest Lisbon' organized by Brazilian belly dancer Cris Aysel, the 'Oriental Dance Weekend' festival and a more recent one 'Dancing Worlds' in Figueira da Foz. These festivals are the breeding grounds for the newer generation of oriental dancers in Portugal, who are finding a space to showcase their performance skills. Catarina observes that the recent generation of oriental dancers excels in technique and quality of movement but she feels that there is a lack of a well defined intention and dance purpose, and that this fact hinders a bit of individuality of the performance. The landscape of specialized oriental dance studios is not too complex. She mentioned that you can count them on your fingers. There are a total of five dance studios spread across Portugal, in Alfovelos, Guimarães, her own dance studio in Setúbal, Amadora, and Braga.

In terms of teaching philosophy, Catarina believes that a good teacher also bears responsibility to psychologically empower and guide her students towards self-worth, self-love and confidence. She observes that a lot of her students have some blockages about being more feminine, regardless of age or body type. There is a lot of shame, prudishness and a feeling of discomfort towards their bodies, especially in the current environment of female objectification. She feels that in this day and age, Bellydance is a statement, a renegotiation of the male gaze and a reclaim of a woman's independence and sense of pride.

Catarina's biggest resistance is to fight against how oriental dance studies and performers are currently perceived in Portugal, be it by the regular audiences as well as by the administrative authorities. She mentioned that she has a solid partnership with the city hall in Setubal to promote oriental dance events, but even so, when there are other dance festivals on the agenda, Oriental dances become almost every time an afterthought. She thinks that by raising awareness within all these social strata, she will be able to earn for her and her students the respect and consideration that other dance forms already have.

### **Ines Pita (Moony)**

Moony is a Lisbon based, fusion belly dancer and jewelry creator. As a little girl she remembers taking ballet classes, but her dance life started in 2012 when she accidentally discovered Sylvia Orchidacee's tribal fusion belly dance class. Hearing the word 'tribal' she thought she was enrolling in a different dance style class. Tribal fusion Bellydance (or transnational fusion Bellydance, term that was coined by scholar/dancer Donna Mejia) is a spin-off of oriental dance and it fuses multiple other styles such as flamenco, or Indian dances or even urban dances.

Her exposure to Oriental dance fusions triggered a realization and transformation in Moony, who was back then attending the Católica University in Lisbon, studying social communication sciences. She understood that the classical upbringing of women, who are pushed towards studying whatever discipline, even if they don't feel a real connection with what they are studying, then to get married, have kids and spend their life, checking all the boxes prescribed by society - was not her path, so she quit the studies after year 1.

After a psychedelic experience where she danced for the whole night with her eyes closed she decided to search for more meaning in her life, and do all the things she dreamed to do, so she started sewing classes, just like her grandma, and fusion Bellydance classes, spending most afternoons at the dance studio. She said it was a great mix because she could sew her own costumes and craft her own dance jewelry. At the dance studio she met Piny Ochridaceae, and started urban dance classes with her. Shortly afterwards, Moony was invited by Piny to be part of the Orchidaceae dance collective. Praising the benefits of dance, Moony said that the only moments when her body, mind and soul are all together in the same place, is while dancing.

When asked about how she was supporting herself and her new life choices she mentioned that her grandma helped pay for the very expensive sewing classes and that she was also busking on the street, with a group of other dancers, trying to make a living as street artists. They would occasionally dance at certain corporate events or birthday parties, to earn extra cash. With the high number of tourists in Lisbon, street dancing was actually profitable. She said that those times were a lot of fun

but also very exhausting because they had to carry their attire (speakers, swords, costumes) up and down the hills of Lisbon, depending on the space they were performing at. Moony also mentioned that street artists were under the obligation to hold a license, issued by the city hall (eg. sound license), which was costing a significant amount of money per month, and that her group couldn't afford such a license. Therefore, while performing they were also on the lookout for the police.

Moony changed dance studios, and moved to Jazzy Dance Studio to be part of the Orchidaceae dance collective. Around that time (2013), on the eve of her birthday, she was run over by a car and came out alive, but with a severely injured knee. She tried really hard not to interpret this as a sign to stop dancing and committed to several hours of physiotherapy per day to speed up her recovery. During her recovery break she turned to crafting body jewelry for dancers and created her own brand of jewelry. This was her way to be still around the dance community and keep herself leveled. She considers this one of the more difficult periods of time in her life, when her decisiveness and her physical and psychological resistance were tested.

After her recovery, Moony started to slowly work with the Orchidaceae dance collective. Some of the movement vocabularies used by Orchidaceae (eg. Floor-work and house) were more challenging for her knee, but she made it through all the difficulties. Moony thought about enrolling at ESD (Escola Superior de Dança) but being discouraged by the 3 years time commitment she decided against it. Reflecting back, Moony said that she regrets this decision now.

To support her dance life Moony worked many part time jobs, at cafes, chiosks, interior design stores, event organization - but she was feeling the precarity of these jobs. Nowadays, Moony is owning and driving her own tuk-tuk throughout Lisbon, and is enjoying a more stable lifestyle, with the income that she earns.

She regularly teaches fusion Bellydance at Jazzy Dance Studios, but her dance life takes up less time than it used to before. She currently doesn't work with Orchidaceae, which has been exploring different types of dance concepts, but says she is missing the group routine and physical practices that they used to have. Moony is taking time to focus on her own performative approach and understanding of her solo dance persona. In this respect she works with burlesque artists such as Veronique Divine, and she enjoys the freedom and individuality of the dance she creates as well as the costumes that she designs for each dance occasion. In terms of fusion Bellydance, Moony has dance collaborations with other dancers from abroad (Adriatica from Berlin) with whom she is organizing dance based retreats. Talking about trends in dance styles and movements, she feels that fusion Bellydance used to be very fashionable but nowadays it dwindled down, being replaced by other styles such as heels, twerking, Afro-Brazilian dances and so forth. Moony also mentioned

working as a plastic artist for rave events, where she designs the decorations for the event infrastructure.

The pandemic period was difficult and Moony started teaching dance online, and focusing more on jewelry and plastic art. She feels that in Portugal the dance profession is taking a secondary seat and that the existing cultural policies are not designed to help the struggling artist.

## Chapter 5. POINTS OF CONTACT

Besides the overarching theme of resistance, which represents the silver-line between all the analyzed dance styles, the current chapter analyzes some of the main points of contact, that spurred a lively conversation among all the interviewed performers, from cultural appropriation to hyper-sexualization and the realization and discontinuation of these paradigms by their practitioners.

The issue of cultural appropriation and the 'place of speech' are recurring reflection themes among the interviewed artists, as most of them are incorporating different dance styles into their artistic fusion. While in the past most of the dance artists enjoyed a huge artistic freedom, combining and borrowing moves from different dance styles, nowadays, the question they ask is how to enter into a tradition and culture that isn't part of their cultural identity, in a respectful, non superficial way. The fact that this reflection started to take place, along with the research processes behind it, is a huge step forward, as it enables the practitioner to observe the origin of the dance, its geo-dislocation and re-allocation of new layers of resistance.

Black Brazilian feminist philosopher, Djamilia Ribeiro, asserts in her book 'Lugar de fala' that every human being has a social locus in the world, a place of speech, and that the way we convey our message, impacts the others in our universe and it's a matter of ethics to recognize this fact. Starting from this viewpoint, the awareness of a dance artist, who works with multiple dance styles, is crucial in diving deeper and starting the work of deconstruction of the different dance identities and facets. The paragraphs below will explore some of the perspectives on the issue of cultural appropriation, that were collected during the interviews.

Some artists consider that there is a significant difference between the place of dance (as a reenactment ethos) and the place of speech of the practitioners of a style directly into the community of origin, or a localized adaptation of such community (eg. practicing Hip Hop in the street, acknowledging the socio-political struggles of the community) and the practitioners of a style into a more veneered space, dissociated from the political aspects (eg. practicing Hip Hop at a dance studio).

My place of dancing comes from a place of a lot of truth and I didn't learn the dances in the studio, I learned either on the street, or within the clubbing scene, because from a very early age I worked and started going to New York to understand what this is. (Piny Orchidaceae).



Regarding the incorporation of new dance styles into one's vocabulary, Piny is asking her students first to start the process of research and to investigate the history, the social context of a certain style. Then she outlines the difference of being exposed to a style through workshops and dance classes vs. practicing the style within a certain community. She advocates for research and a long-term diligent practice, before fusing two dance styles together. Piny also warns against the westernized, extractive mentality, that comes from a place of privilege, and has the permission to dance freely, unlike in other more rigid societies, and that sometimes goes for superficial inspiration into other cultures, without fully acknowledging them.

Talking about the subject of appropriation of Oriental dances by western culture, there are multiple paradoxical views: on one hand the Oriental dances practiced by the western centric society seem at times a continuation of the Orientalist fantasy, and it is the practitioner who bears the responsibility of not further contributing to the oppression or offending of people from MENAHT cultures. On the other hand, a western manifestation of Oriental dances, traveling off the margins, is perceived as a way to create the 'new woman', who is empowered by this sense of control over her body and her sexuality, thus destabilizing the western patriarchy. The more radical views in the community of MENHAT dancers caution that Raks-sharki shouldn't be the expression of choice utilized by white women to combat patriarchy. They regard the western subjects performing the otherness, along with the costumes and the orientalized stage names, as a 'brownface' of the Orientalist façade. Another facet that speaks to cultural appropriation is represented by the mere fact that most of the scholarly work about Oriental dances isn't written by a person of color, a representative of the originating community.

A more reforming view is that cultural appropriation is happening everywhere (eg. even getting dressed is an act of cultural appropriation) and that this issue could be rendered invalid and powerless if the society we live in "would stop guarding cultures and subcultures in efforts to preserve them. It's naive, paternalistic" (Porto based dance artist Melisa Sousa). Melisa, took the time to write down a few suggestions to tackle cultural appropriation: "pay homage to artistry and ideas, and acknowledge their origins, remembering ourselves that culture is fluid, engage on learning better about other cultures, treat a cultural exchange like any other creative collaboration, give credit properly, last but ultimately, just be an honest good person. really."

Another perspective comes with Vogue artist Nala Revlon who explained that the incipient Vogue community in Portugal wants to be an inclusive one, to transform and counteract its divisive origins, when Black and Latino drag queens were discriminated against by the white Manhattan drag circuit, and welcome every race and gender that needs this space of expression. She carefully added that

there are conscious education efforts happening, to let all the participants in the community know about the main target demographic of Vogue (queer people of color—specifically trans, poor, working, sex-working, homeless), who still consists of multiple politically and socially oppressed identities. And that in honoring the essence of the Vogue community, gender, race and politics should still be main drivers that confer a place of speech.

Talking to Lucia Afonso, who is currently studying Anthropology, about the role of participant observation within a community and the place of speech of the person that chronicles a specific community, she mentioned that the observing participant has to vested morally and that his/her place of speech comes from his quality as an objective witness, who immerses himself/herself in the respective field, and writes down facts, based on the findings that arise by speaking with different key members in the community. The observing participant's objectivity comes from being outside of a community, and this objectivity can be useful to reveal tensions that are at times clouded by the subjectivity from within a certain community. The markers of marginality are still there, preventing the people immersed in the community from forming an objective view.

All the interviewed artists think about practicing a new dance style with the respect and understanding of the community of origin, claiming a place of speech as an ally to the style, validated by the research and training that they put into this dance form. They've also acknowledged that there is a fine line when they work with movements that stem from a marginalized culture, that isn't theirs, and that they also make conscious efforts to promote or help practitioners from within those communities.

A second sub-theme that constitutes grounds for resistance, for most performers that were interviewed, is the hyper-sexualization and objectification of the performer, associated with a certain dance style.

According to Melisa Sousa, there are multiple social factors that contribute to the hyper-sexualization of women in dance and society. Paraphrasing scholar Lisa Sandlos ('Shimmy, Shake or Shudder?: A Feminist Ethnographic Analysis of Sexualization and Hyper-sexualization in Competitive Dance', 2020), Melissa feels that the abundance of sexualized images of girls and women in mass media (TV shows, YouTube videos), the fact that a lot of mothers that don't discourage the sexualization of their daughters, the fact that colleagues and partners expect dance behaviors that emulate the images that they consume in mass media - are influencing the formation of a young dancer's self identity as overly sexual and are also detrimental to the art of dance. She mentions that hyper-sexualization is deeply rooted in Hip Hop culture, as women are objectified through lyrics, their style of dressing, and the repetitive sexualized movement aesthetics.

“In battles, women that are seen as powerful are too masculine and women that are below male dominance, are feminine soft and fragile. So, these perceptions influence the way we rule and contaminate these environments for groups and groups of people.” (Melisa Sousa)

Oriental dancer Catarina Branco talked about how the practitioners of this dance style are objectified due to the remaining figment of Orientalism, which views the dancer as a mysterious, exotic seductress with sensuous movements. This Orientalist representation of the dance performer was visually reflected by the eroticized descriptions and images of belly dancers, distributed as paintings, postcards and later in cinema. The word ‘exotic’, which originally was used to refer to a far away geography and culture, is substituted nowadays with the word ‘erotic’, when associated with dance styles such as Oriental dances.

Another aspect, which Catarina thinks triggers this objectification, is the body of the solo female performer on stage (generally Raks-sharki is an improvised solo dance), which is inscribed with uncontrolled sexuality, by the colonialist desire to dominate. As a response to this societal pressure, some of Catarinas students are concerned about developing their femininity on stage, downplaying this aspect as much as they can. To remedy this blockage, Catarina talks about the actual autonomy that oriental dancers have over their own bodies. Besides the obvious muscle control, oriental dancers are also in command of their sexuality, deciding how much or how little they want to reveal themselves, thus also taking charge regarding their role as the ‘gazed’ person. She wants to send a positive message to her students and instill in them a sense of agency, by guiding them to focus on the feminist essence of the dance, which empowers it’s protagonists to stand their ground and demand respect from the male gaze.

On the other hand, Piny views all these dances as an expression of instinct and sexuality, because human beings are at core sexual animals. Dance is the physical artistic expression of human emotions and sexuality remains an important quality of human nature. Both dance and sex utilize the same tool of expression, namely the body.

However it helps to look at all of these vernacular dances through an anthropological lens, deconstructing and identifying the symbolic gestures, customs and rituals of a certain dance, in order to dispel the racial stereotypes of the hyper-sexuality of the non western ‘other’. Piny gave as an example the dance of ‘Mapouka’ from Côte d’Ivoire, a dance which focuses on the buttock, and represents the expression of joy and celebration of fertility rather than a sexual provocation. Translated to Global North audiences, and taken out of its cultural context, this dance is perceived as a powerful icon of primitivism and overt sexuality and has been assimilated to the modern day ‘twerking’.

Contrastingly, sexuality in western dance cultures has been neutered by placing a lot more focus on the aesthetic of the dance, the overall mise-en-scène (lights, sound, decor, dance props), by having choreographers crafting gender fluid movements, by utilizing unobtrusive costuming and enforce the perception of the body as a biometrical entity (weight, mass, density), hence diminishing the sensuality component of the dance.

Anthropologist Judith Hanna, cited the work of choreographer and dancer Susan Leigh Foster, , emphasizing that “For one hundred years, modern dancers and choreographers have resisted all allegations that their art alluded, however discretely or remotely, to sex. The body was cultivated as a musculoskeletal system that responded to emotional but never sexual impulses”. ( Hanna, 2010, pg. 213)

“In most cases we will find that dance forms originating in lower-class or non-dominant populations present a trajectory of "upward mobility" in which the dances are "refined," "polished," and often desexualized”. (Desmond, 1997, pg. 34)

A different view on the issue of hyper-sexualization is brought by queer theory, which talks about fluid identities, rather than the assigned binary categories (male/female). Vogue is an ambassador for queer representation in the world, and one of the dance styles that best embodies this theory. Within the Vogue community the members embrace and express their own gendered and sexual identities, which can be multiple: lesbian, gay, genderqueer, bisexual, bigender, transgender, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, a-gender, pansexual and polyamorous, evolving beyond the binary thinking pattern, into a more inclusive paradigm.

Dancers break free from the limitations of the conventional dance world, allowing themselves the freedom of expression and exploration of queer modes of movement, celebrating the queer body and life experience. Vogue comes to defy the concept of hyper-sexualization, as defined by our neoliberalist, heteronormative reality (eg. which equates to oppression, patriarchy, racism and more) by dismantling the prescribed gender balance, and celebrating an over the top femininity (especially within the Vogue femme sub-category of Vogue). This exaggeration of femininity is the catalyst for empowerment of the performers to own their sexuality. Hyper-sexuality becomes thus a mode of revealing the true self, and the Vogue aesthetic becomes a political tool for the deviant body, a counter-site of expression and resistance against the binary framework that is so deeply embedded in our current society.

The empowerment of vernacular dances on the socio-political arena is indisputable. The analyzed dance styles are utilized as a life source and as a mode of expression of their performers' personal

and collective struggles. Dance is viewed here as a tool of affirmation of the self, transcending sanctioned identities, gender, class and race. There is no coincidence that all the dances that are chronicled in this paper, have a common originating geography (eg. the African continent, as mother of humanity and dance), thus situating themselves in an anti-hegemonic space, manifesting various forms of resistance by their practitioners, and having some strong community mechanisms to support and further them. The roots of each analyzed dance, have survived the transatlantic slave trade and or the cultural appropriation and invisibilization by western society, and they still breath through the locally adapted and even distorted dance practices.

A significant trait of all the analyzed vernacular dances, is the freedom of individual expression that they confer to their practitioners and the improvisational nature that is intrinsic to these dances. The improvisational characteristic of the movement stems also from the fact that all these dances are all participatory in nature, where the dancers, musicians and spectators feed off each other's energy. For instance in Hip Hop dance battles, freestyle performers are able to connect to the music and to the other contestants by means of honing the art of improvisation, which is exactly the area where the creativity and invention of new movements appears. At Vogue balls, personal expression is the goal and usually Voguers improvise and stylize their performance according to what social model they want to reveal about themselves in front of the judges. The criteria of success relies on a well built persona. In Oriental dances, the soloist often improvises based on what the music dictates. For example, the oriental dancer is sometimes searching for the trance feeling of 'tarab' which consists of a symbiotic merger between dance, music and the audience, thus generating an emotional transformation for both the dancer and the audience. Other times, the dancer is trying to mimic an instrument (eg. drums, oud or nai) with a body part, so that the resulting movement could be perceived as the kinetic emulation of the actual instrument.

In Portugal, these vernacular dance styles are practiced with utter respect and care towards their originating social and geographical communities. The Portuguese dance communities of Hip Hop and Oriental dances are fairly new, formed in the decade of 1980 - 1990, while the voguing community is just now birthing. Their representatives are leveraging these dances as a platform to build and inspire localized communities. All interviewed artists are acting from a place of reflection, transparency and ethics, aiming to educate and develop the communities that they've started or helped building, as well as adjacent members of their community, about the history, the context and the political aspects of resistance in these dances.

For instance Lúcia Afonso (Baronesa) draws attention to the Angolan and Cabo Verdean artistic roots in the social neighborhood Cruz Vermelha and together with her husband, she started to develop

social projects related to dance and culture, where neighborhood kids can learn about Hip Hop culture, expanding the universe of marginalized communities with cultural discovery. Catarina Campos has organized 'Your Hip Hop Workshop' as an introductory dance language Hip Hop workshop for teens, unLocking and demystifying the concept of freestyle and putting Hip Hop on the foreground of teen culture. Piny organized together with the Orchidaceae dance collective numerous lectures on the history and development of some of the main urban and clubbing dances from the Afro Hispanic community in the U.S, also lectures regarding Orientalism and the weight of North African colonization in western expressions of dance (eg. Tribal Talks). Nala Revlon started the Vogue chapter in Portugal by organizing together with Piny talks and debates meant to shed some light about the history and the essence of the ballroom community and Catarina Branco structured her oriental dance school as an environment of learning holistically about movement and its culture of origins.

While originally, vernacular dances have been transmitted by learning approaches related to a certain social context (eg. situated learning) or by experiential learning (eg. learning by doing), there is currently a tendency to systematize and disseminate the dance content, for people that are also outside of the originating community, via dance studios and dance schools. In this respect, one can observe a path towards the professionalization of the vernacular dancer in Portugal and the roles dance studios play with their specialized class offerings (Oriental dances, transnational fusion belly dance, Hip Hop, Vogue), targeted to the broader audiences. The appearance in 2011 of dance studios such as 'Jazzy Dance Studios' with its five schools in various locations throughout Portugal, with a varied offering of vernacular dances, or the 'Arcade Dance Center' in Lisbon, dedicated to street dances and performance, have created a space of representation for the 'old school' dance communities as well as for the more commercial variations, providing a broad cultural spectrum and a lucrative environment for vernacular dance professionals and teachers.

Almost all the interviewed dancers have multiple vernacular styles in their bodies, and have been traveling on and off the margins, paving the way and bringing these non institutional dances towards the central arena. They do so either by maintaining the purity of their style (eg. the Vogue dance style was showcased with the occasion of the Deities ball, in Porto's municipal theater, in its raw form) or by creating artistic fusions which mix two or more dance styles together (eg. Piny's 'G RITO is utilizing various movement styles: from Oriental dances to Vogue, and Hip Hop, to convey the message of ancestry and its continuation, the decolonization of the female body and its resistance in a predominant patriarchal society). These artistic fusions represent a bridge from the preservation of vernacular dances to expanding these styles, by showcasing them in fusion or in contrast with other dance styles, while being transparent and knowledgeable about the origin of each fused dance style.

The quality of execution and the open attitude towards mixing vernacular styles with other dance styles, contributes a much needed de-hierarchization of dance styles, in which institutional dances were regarded as more elevated and to a shift in racial, class and gender ideologies of power.

The historical institutional reticence towards the integration of these vernacular dances, could have been perceived as a continuation of the colonialist narrative and the post-colonialist struggle of its practitioners, but there is actually a shift happening regarding non-institutionalized dances, which now on the backdrop of the social movements such as Black Lives Matter, #metoo, seem to be positively received by Academia and other cultural/administrative institutions.

Piny, with a dance background of over 20 years, talked about the aid and recognition that she has received from the institution(s) she was in contact with, to showcase her choreographic dance piece 'G RITO'. While being grateful for the experience, she has also mentioned that this institutional acknowledgement came only now, when she is in her early 40'ies, as if until today, her work was invisible or unworthy.

The question that remains to be answered is whether these vernacular dance styles started to be well received by the art institutions, during the past years due to the great personal efforts of their practitioners or is there a broader trend at play? What is the impact that this emerging openness will have on the ethos of these styles? The fact that more and more institutional partnerships are happening (eg. Vogue conquering the Rivoli municipal theater, Piny's artistic fusions shown on main Portuguese stages, Catarina Branco's partnership with the city hall in Setubal for the oriental dance festival 'Maktub', Catarina Campos and Melisa Sousa partnership with the city hall in Santa Maria Feira to organize the urban dance festival LOOP), shows a receptiveness towards cultural differences and an acceptance of other artistic manifestations, indicating a positive trend in the Portuguese dance landscape. By bringing vernacular dances into institutions, they become more accessible to the broader audiences, and encourages a much needed pluralism of dance modalities.

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**ANEXOS**

### About the interview

- *Interview medium:* Open source video platform (meet.jit.si)
- *Interview language:* English and Portuguese
- *Duration:* Between 1 hr - 1:30 hr
- *Purpose of the interview:* spur a candid conversation about some of the listed topics, to make the interviewer better understand the world of the interviewed dancer - through collaborative and reflexive exploration. The outcome of this conversation will be processed and included in the research that will sustain the master thesis in artistic studies entitled : *'Dances of resistance in Portugal on and off the margins'*
- *Starting point:* the researcher has established respectful, on-going relationships with most of the interviewees, including enough rapport for these to be a genuine exchange of views.

### Questionnaire

#### Dancer's bio

- How did you come to dance?
- What is your dance rooted in? What has influenced your dance? Who has influenced your dance?

#### Positionality

- How do you position your dance style in relation to contemporary/modern/post modern dance? (especially in Portugal's dance scene)
- Do you consider your dance style a style of resistance? If yes, how would you describe this resistance?

#### Social awareness and activism

- Does gender and culture or religion influence the expressions of your body? How?
- Did you feel your voice has been silenced throughout your parkours?
- What do you think about the hyper-sexualization and objectification of specific dance styles in your area of practice? (i.e. Bellydance)
- Did you encounter cultural appropriation in your dance practices? What is your position with regard to cultural appropriation in dance as an art form?

- How do you deal with institutions that are elitist and patriarchal (i.e. universities)? In your dance practice, do you occupy any patriarchal spaces? Or do you spend more time on strengthening the margins?
- What are some of the causes that you're standing for? Do you incorporate these in your dance expression?

#### Teaching methodology

- What is your favorite way to teach? What is your approach to teaching and interpreting, dance?
- Who is your favorite teaching audience?
- What does it take to create or be part of a troupe?

#### Creation

- What is your latest creation?
- What is your approach to creating dance?
- What is one of the creations you are mostly proud of?

#### Audience & Community

- Who is in your teaching audience? Who is your performance audience?
- What is the community you belong to?
- What is the audience that you would like to have (that you don't already have)
- What community would you want to belong to (that you already don't belong to)

#### More personal

- How did Covid influence your practice? What are your thoughts and feelings coming out of it?
- Can you make a living from teaching and performing dance? What other means of support do you have?
- What is your relation to ancestry and spirituality?
- Is motherhood/fatherhood on your path?